HOLIDAY ARTS: Stanley Kauffmann, Jennifer Homans, Jed Perl, James Wolcott

THE NEW REPUBLIC

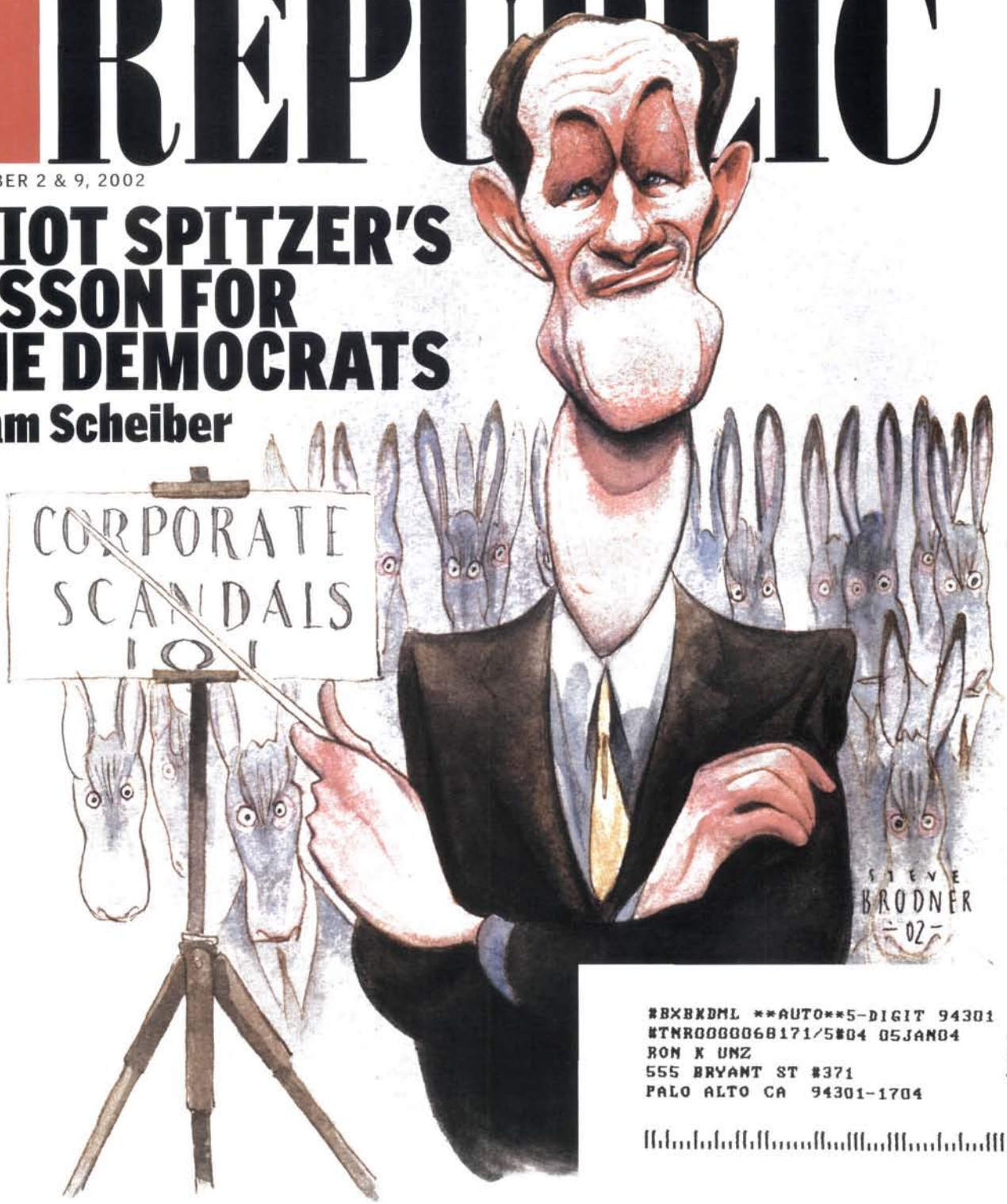
THE GOP'S SHAM PATRIOTISM
Peter Beinart

THE WHITE HOUSE'S IRAQ QUANDARY Ryan Lizza

DECEMBER 2 & 9, 2002

ELIOT SPITZER'S LESSON FOR THE DEMOCRATS

Noam Scheiber



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Cycle of abuse

TO THE EDITORS:

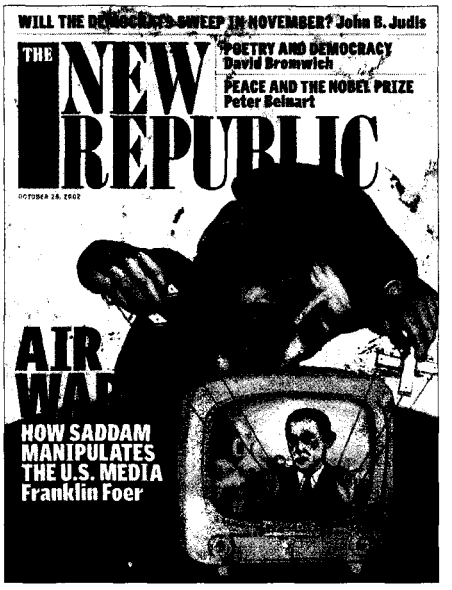
Michelle Cottle's article attacking the new campaign finance law makes for puzzling reading ("New Money," October 28). Cottle objects to broadcast attack advertising run by essentially anonymous political groups in the Minnesota campaign and then suggests that it will somehow be worse once the McCain-Feingold reforms take effect for the next election cycle. She makes this argument despite the fact that those reforms address the very abuses about which she complains. Under McCain-Feingold, groups that run radio and TV advertisements that promote or attack federal candidates during an election period will have to disclose the sources of the funding for that advertising. This requirement applies to individual, corporate, and union-funded candidate ads.

Cottle's second point is that the parties' soft money that McCain-Feingold does away with may find its way into outside groups that will use it to fund more negative advertising. With parties no longer organizing the solicitation of soft money, this is doubtful. Furthermore, if the courts uphold the new law's restrictions on the financing of electioneering communications, it will not be permissible to use corporate or labor funds for the sort of advertising Cottle saw in Minnesota this year.

TREVOR POTTER
Former Federal Election Commissioner and Chairman
Washington, D.C.

MICHELLE COTTLE REPLIES:

As my piece noted, the problem with McCain-Feingold is that all those restrictions placed on third-party ads are widely expected to be dismantled faster than you can say "soft-money loophole"—which is a shame, since the law puts precious few burdens on outside groups as is. Currently, under McCain-Feingold, if a 501c4 advocacy group wants to run certain types of spots within 30 days of a primary or 60 days of a general election, they must use only hard money, which requires disclosure of donors. But even this mild attempt to regulate what kind of money can be spent on "issue ads" is facing multiple court challenges, and it's likely that most, if not all, of the restrictions will be overturned on the grounds that they unconstitutionally restrict individuals' ability to influence the political debate. (Even former reformers note the Supreme Court's historical wariness of any attempt to limit issue advocacy.) Unsurprisingly, the national parties are scrambling to form their own 501c4 groups in an effort to make an end run around the law. Even assuming the courts do uphold the third-party restrictions, enforcement will still fall to a reform-hostile FEC that's already working furiously to gut McCain-Feingold. Among several recent rulings narrowing the law's scope for which the agency is being sued by reform advocates, the commissioners decreed that 501c3 groups are exempt from the new advertising limits.



Prize patrol

TO THE EDITORS:

I must respond to Peter Beinart's TRB column criticizing the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Jimmy Carter ("Prize Fight," October 28). While Beinart may not think that President Carter's efforts to mediate disputes are praiseworthy, there is so much more to his activities that Beinart failed to mention. Were Carter not involved in mediation at all, his activities would still be deserving of a Nobel Prize.

Besides his participation in building houses for the poor through Habitat for Humanity, the Carter Center has also been involved in the Atlanta Project to coordinate federal and state aid to the local inner city. On the international scene, the Carter Center has been the prime mover of a program to combat river blindness in Africa. That may have saved the eyesight of thousands, if not millions, of people. Beinart also fails to mention the Carter Center's participation in election-monitoring in Venezuela, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and a number of other nascent democracies. In fact, Carter may have been more responsible than anyone else for supervising the peaceful downfall of the Communist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. When considered in its totality, I believe Carter's contribution to international peace is undeniable and worthy of the highest regard.

DANIEL FRANKLIN
Atlanta, Georgia

Bad rap

TO THE EDITORS:

In discussing Robert Pinsky's book *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*, David Bromwich's tangential condemnation of rap music detracts from an otherwise well-considered review ("The Roughs and Beards," October 28). It is demeaning for a critic of his stature and intelligence to dismiss rap as a vehicle only for "rage, resentment, and dull self-pity" and to delineate a simplified world of "bad" or "good" in which he places rap squarely in the realm of the "bad." Even if much of rap dwells on the emotions Bromwich identifies, not all of it does; his statements are not only profoundly reductive in their smug refusal to acknowledge the complexity of rap as a genre, but as such they betray Bromwich's ignorance about his subject. He writes as someone who understands rap only to the extent that he has heard about it from other people. His remarks might not be so offensive if he did not allow "poetry" to escape from the beating scot-free; if not rage and resentment, surely a great deal of poetry today reeks of "dull self-pity," narcissism, and worse. "Poetry" here resembles a spoiled sibling, crouching behind Bromwich's legs and silently making faces at rap as he berates it. Perhaps if Bromwich bothered to take the time to consider the sources of the "rage" and "resentment" he so deplores, he might find that some of it stems from the very type of arrogance and closed-mindedness he exemplifies in his review.

DAVID KEELING
Brooklyn, New York

DAVID BROMWICH REPLIES:

I do not claim to be an authority on rap. I have heard about as much of it as the average father of two American boys can expect to have heard by the time the boys are in their teens. But that is more than my questioner may be aware of. As music, it lacks music; as poetry, it lacks art. There are undoubtedly exceptions, but the book I

continued on page 41

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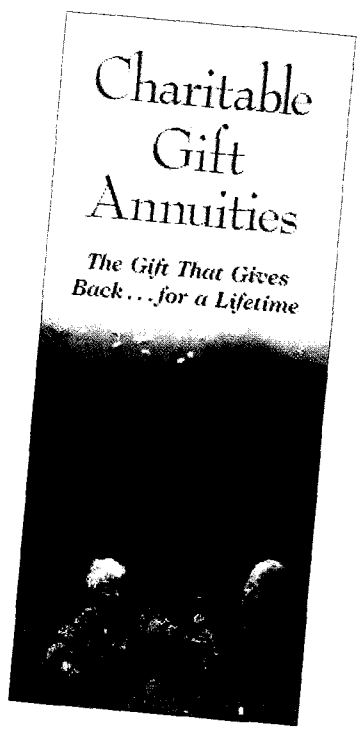

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Eight Days

FUTURE HISTORIANS WILL note that it took a grand total of eight days. When the Republicans swept to victory on November 5, they rushed to reassure the nation that, this time, they would not overreach. They would govern as they campaigned: on an agenda that commands broad popular support. They would not reward their big-money backers at the public's expense. They had learned the lesson of 1994.

Turns out they lied. Eight days into this new era of Republican dominance, George W. Bush's GOP has not merely succumbed to Gingrichism; they've surpassed it. The 1994 revolutionaries, after all, only sacrificed social justice to their K Street cronies. In a time of war, the Bushies have now sacrificed patriotism as well.

The issue is called "corporate inversion." U.S. companies reincorporate abroad, usually in tiny countries like the Cayman Islands, to avoid paying U.S. taxes. In everything but name, the corporations remain American—in many countries, reincorporation only requires a signed document and a fee. But, by avoiding taxes, they cost the U.S. government an estimated $4 billion per year.

In the Bush administration's first year, "corporate inversion" received little public attention. And so, as Anand Giridharadas chronicled in the September 3, 2001, issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC, the Bushies were free to facilitate the practice without paying a political price. In the summer of 2001, when European countries, through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, tried to pressure countries like Bermuda to revoke the sweetheart tax breaks that lure international corporations to reincorporate there, the Bush administration quashed the effort. A few liberals screamed, but the media took little notice, and the controversy disappeared without a trace.

But, in 2002, two events gave the issue new salience. The first was the September 11 attacks and the rush of patriotism they inspired. All of a sudden, U.S. companies evading taxes by reincorporating abroad weren't just being unfair; they were being disloyal. The second was Enron, which reminded the press that corporate leaders weren't necessarily the ethical paragons that the business hagiography of the '90s had made them out to be. In February, when The Stanley Works announced its plans to reincorporate from New Britain, Connecticut, to Bermuda, offshore tax cheating burst onto the front page. Tyco and Global Crossing, it would later come out, had reincorporated to avoid taxes as well. When *The Washington Post*'s Jonathan Weisman reported an Ernst & Young partner's comment that "a lot of companies feel that ... the improvement on earnings is powerful enough to say that maybe the patriotism issue should take a back seat," offshore tax cheating began to look like a political rout.

As late as May, the Bush administration was still defending corporate tax-dodgers, arguing in a preliminary Treasury Department report that the problem wasn't corporate patriotism or ethics, but rather America's excessive business taxes. But that stance was proving increasingly untenable. WorldCom followed Enron, and the press began investigating ethical chicanery at Harken and Halliburton. During Dick Cheney's tenure at Halliburton, the White House discovered, to its chagrin, the number of company subsidiaries incorporating offshore had jumped from nine to 44.

Big offshore companies hired a slew of K Street lobbyists to protect their government contracts—Bob Dole, former House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer, former House Speaker Robert Livingston. But to no avail. On July 26, the House passed an amendment barring corporate expatriates from receiving contracts with the prospective Department of Homeland Security. Five days later, the Senate placed similar restrictions on contracts with the Pentagon. Reversing course, President Bush said, "I think we ought to look at people who are trying to avoid U.S. taxes as a problem. I think American companies ought to pay taxes and be good citizens." Trent Lott chimed in, too: "We ought to go after them. It agitates me that companies [would] be doing that." On September 5, the Senate voted to bar offshore tax cheats from homeland security contracts as well.

Only Phil Gramm, a retiring senator from a right-wing state, could still afford to parrot K Street's line. At one point during the Senate debate, Gramm called the new restrictions "right out of Nazi Germany." But the game was up. It was election season, and Republicans were running as the party of patriotism. K Street would have to wait.

The wait, however, wouldn't prove to be long. When Congress reconvened in a lame-duck session after the November 5 election, the Bush administration demanded that it pass the homeland security bill once and for all. The vanquished Democrats, who had been fighting the White House's efforts to strip the bill of civil service protections, quickly gave in. On November 13, eight days after the election, the House Republican leadership stuffed seven new provisions into the bill—one of which gutted the restrictions on offshore companies gaining Homeland Security Department contracts—and rammed the new legislation through. John McCain would later complain that, by introducing these new provisions at the eleventh hour, with virtually no public debate, the Republican leadership had "sidestepped the appropriate process."

When the legislation reached the Senate, Democrats cried foul. But the Bush administration, although ostensibly against corporate tax cheats, lobbied hard for the bill's passage nonetheless. So did Lott, who denounced the Democrats as obstructionist for trying to remove the new House provisions. Finally, after moderate Senate Republicans Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins threatened to join the Democrats and defeat the bill, Lott reversed course and promised to restore the tax-cheat restrictions when Congress reconvenes in January. Snowe and Collins hailed it as a victory. But already Republicans are reinterpreting Lott's pledge as a promise merely to "reconsider" the issue. The smart money says that corporate tax-evaders are home free.

The lesson is painfully obvious. Parties show their true colors not during elections, when they need to appeal to swing voters, but after they have won elections, when they feel politically secure enough to do what they really believe. And the bald reality of Bush's Republican Party is that, in the absence of countervailing public pressure, corporate special interests trump everything, including patriotism. In the last couple of weeks, many Democrats have looked at their incoherent, timid party and wondered why they bother. Now Tom DeLay, Lott, and Bush have provided an answer. With this Republican Party as the alternative, how can it not be worth the fight?

PETER BEINART

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A Separate War

ALL THE EVIDENCE suggests that Vladimir Putin is about to retaliate against last month's terrorist attack on a Moscow theater with characteristic ruthlessness. His generals have halted a planned troop pullout from Chechnya and vowed a renewed Russian offensive. Putin himself has stepped up his rhetoric, vowing never to negotiate with Chechnya's elected president. And the Russian Duma has voted to amend media laws to further restrict press coverage of future military actions in the breakaway republic.

Given Russia's past forays into Chechnya, these developments ought to be a matter of some concern in Washington. Human rights organizations have documented Russian abuses in Chechnya in gory detail—including, in one recent case, the discovery of the burned remains of nine civilians killed by Russian forces. At least 140,000 Chechens have been forced to flee the province. Yet, so far, Washington has shown virtually no concern at all. President Bush has declared this a "'time of solidarity" with Russia. Speaking with European reporters earlier this week, the president explained that America's "good friend" Putin should "do what it takes to protect his people from ... terrorist attacks"—implicitly acceding to Putin's long-standing argument that his actions in Chechnya are of a piece with the U.S. war on terrorism.

They're not. Russia clearly faces a threat in Chechnya, but, Putin's spin notwithstanding, that threat is secession, not global Islamic terrorism. Unlike the killers in Bali and at the World Trade Center, the Chechens have a specific, local grievance: They want autonomy or independence. According to Thomas de Waal, co-author of a comprehensive book on Chechnya titled *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, most Chechens are liberal Sufi Muslims who have no sympathy for Islamic fundamentalism and whose decade-long campaign has focused on one goal: leaving Russia. (Chechens are far more likely to dress in leather jackets or traditional headscarves than *chadors*.) What's more, in part because the region is surrounded on three sides by Russian troops and on the fourth by high mountains, few Islamist volunteers have traveled to Chechnya from abroad.

Putin's American apologists say the United States can't afford to be squeamish about human rights in Chechnya because we need Russia's help in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond. But, in fact, it is precisely because of geostrategic concerns that the United States must distinguish Russia's actions in Chechnya from U.S. efforts against global Islamist terrorism. Giving Moscow a free pass in Chechnya—as the Bush administration seems strongly inclined to do—will further alienate moderate Muslims around the world from U.S. goals and interests. Indeed, Islamists have already begun using Russian atrocities in Chechnya as an issue with which to bludgeon the United States. On his latest audiotape attempt to reach his target audience—young Muslim men—Osama bin Laden explicitly refers to Chechnya. Islamic extremists in Britain have highlighted Chechnya in speeches, calling on followers to fight the United States and its allies to the death. Islamist leaders in Pakistan have made the plight of Chechen Muslims a central focus of their anti-Western diatribes.

Certainly, fear of offending public opinion in the Muslim world cannot be the overriding goal of U.S. foreign policy. There are many cases—the war in Afghanistan, the potential war with Iraq, U.S. support for Israel—where American security and American principles require ignoring the sentiment of the Muslim "street." But Russia's abuses in Chechnya are not such a case. Our values clearly impel us to push for a peaceful solution to that conflict. And, while Russia's cooperation in the war on terrorism is important, Putin has many more reasons to cooperate with the United States than not.

Ultimately, if the United States hopes to win the war on terrorism, it must persuade moderate Muslims that it is not fighting a war against Islam. Several of the biggest catches in the battle against Al Qaeda have taken place in Pakistan, for instance, where a shaky government relies on the support of moderate Muslims and where Islamists have made major gains over the past year. The United States, in other words, needs not only military victories but political ones as well. Coming to the aid of threatened Muslim minorities in the Balkans during the 1990s helped improve America's image in the Muslim world, demonstrating that our political ideals pertain regardless of religion. Funding programs for moderate Muslim scholars and helping build liberal, secular schools so poor children in countries like Pakistan have an alternative to radical *madrassas* may help as well. But such efforts will be of little use if the United States is seen as abetting, without comment or criticism, the Russian bloodletting in Chechnya. The world is watching. ■

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NOTEBOOK

VICTORS REWRITE HISTORY WATCH: Way back in June, we noted in this space that Georgia Senate candidate Saxby Chambliss was impugning the patriotism of incumbent Max Cleland—who lost both legs and an arm in Vietnam—in his effort to win Cleland's seat. Well, he was, and unfortunately it worked. But, unsatisfied with a tainted GOP win, the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* is now trying to whitewash it. In an editorial this week, titled "BIRTH OF A POLITICAL URBAN LEGEND," the *Journal* said the idea that Chambliss had questioned Cleland's patriotism was a "cock-and-bull story," "misinformation," and a "myth." Talk about projection. In fact, attacks on Cleland's patriotism formed the subtext of virtually the entire Chambliss campaign, as noted by innumerable press accounts leading up to and following the election. First, there was the ad charging that Cleland had "directly contradict[ed]" his oath to "protect and defend" the nation by voting (along with 56 other senators, eleven of them Republicans) against a 1997 amendment to the Chemical Weapons Treaty. (Don't recall this particular nation-threatening vote? Perhaps that's because all the measure would have done is ban chemical weapons inspectors from nations that had sponsored terrorism or violated nonproliferation laws—an unnecessary restriction given that the United States was already able to block inspectors from suspect nations.) How does the *Journal* argue that this particular bit of political slime does not constitute an assault on Cleland's patriotism? It doesn't, tellingly avoiding any mention of the ad at all. The *Journal* does mention a subsequent Chambliss ad, which it claims challenged only Cleland's voting record. "He says he supports President Bush [in the war on terror] at every opportunity," the *Journal* quotes the ad as saying. "But that's not the truth." But, here again, what the *Journal* omits is more relevant than what it cites. The sentence in the ad immediately previous to that quoted by the *Journal* was this: "As America faces terrorists and extremist dictators, Max Cleland runs television ads claiming he has the courage to lead. He says he supports President Bush at every opportunity, but that's not the truth." In case anyone missed the point, the ad featured footage of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. So, on one side you have Chambliss and the president (who campaigned heavily for him) and on the other you have Saddam, bin Laden—and Cleland. Indeed, Chambliss made this linkage explicit in a spectacularly idiotic effort to deny it on CNN. "There was never any linkage in that ad between bin Laden, Hussein, and Cleland," Chambliss told Wolf Blitzer on November 10. "There was linkage between bin Laden, Hussein, and a lack of a homeland security bill. There was linkage between Cleland and the lack of the homeland security bill." We see. In that vein, we would like to clarify that we intend no linkage between *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page and a repellent effort to smear Cleland as unpatriotic. There was linkage between the *Journal* and Chambliss. There was linkage between Chambliss and the Cleland smear. Readers are invited to draw their own conclusions.

THE VISION THING: Speaking of *The Wall Street Journal* and senators from Georgia, the paper also recently published an op-ed by Democrat Zell Miller, explaining to his party what went wrong in this month's election. Miller's message? That the Democrats lacked one. "It's hard to run on your vision," he explained to *Journal* readers, "when you don't have a vision." The irony here, of course, is that a key reason the Democratic Party doesn't have a vision is that it is too busy trying not to alienate Miller. On virtually every recent policy dispute between the parties—taxes, prescription drugs, the homeland security bill—Miller has opposed the Democratic leadership and the vast majority of his colleagues. So, given that Miller opposes every real-world way in which his party tries to differentiate itself from the Republicans, how does he propose they differentiate themselves? His recommendations in the *Journal* run the gamut from the irrelevant ("Why couldn't we national Democrats be as tough on crime as the Republicans?" he asks, as if there had been any discernable difference between the parties in years) to the outright goofy ("Why couldn't we Democrats push to spread the massive government bureaucracy now concentrated in Washington out around the whole nation?"). But it is Miller's proposals for how the government should raise revenues that are the most telling. He begins his policy grab bag with, "Why couldn't our party push for a national lottery?" and concludes it with, "[W]hy in heaven's name can't our party be for real tax cuts? ... We should be a party advocating for more tax cuts, not less." So let's see: Miller's "vision" for the Democrats consists primarily of outflanking the Republicans in their desire to shovel tax cuts to the well-to-do and making up the lost revenue by bilking the poor out of their money. It has been a mystery for several years now why Miller hasn't switched parties. Perhaps it's because the Republicans aren't conservative enough for him.

MINORITY REPORT: In last week's issue, we lamented that Bay Area Representative Nancy Pelosi's ascension to the post of House minority leader suggested that House Democrats were contemplating a potentially disastrous lurch to the left, particularly on foreign affairs. During her subsequent appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" this past weekend, Pelosi did little to allay these fears. Consider her response to host Tim Russert's straightforward question about the threat Saddam poses to the United States—the question around which U.S. foreign policy ultimately must revolve. "Saddam Hussein certainly has chemical and biological weapons," Pelosi offered. "There's no question about that. He has some delivery system capacity. But at [the time of the congressional Iraq debate], the administration was saying that there was going to be a launch of a nuclear weapon to the U.S." What a peculiar answer. Evading the essential question of whether she believed Saddam posed a real threat to the United States, Pelosi instead lobbed a

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dubious charge of dishonesty at the White House, which has consistently maintained that the threat Iraq poses is a future one that must be "preempted." When Russert asked if Pelosi supports "intrusive" U.N. weapons inspections or a less aggressive approach, she again punted. "I believe the inspections should be effective"—now there's a bold position!—"So we may have to find some calibration of this between the two." She then added, "But one thing is for sure, we have to find out what we're going in there to look for." Well, yes—whatever that means. Perhaps most remarkable of all, Pelosi told Russert that if she had it to do over again, she would not change her vote against the 1991 Gulf war—"On the basis of the information that I had at that time." Even if one admires Pelosi's steadfastness, there's little question that the 1991 vote was a disaster for the Democrats, one that has undermined their credibility on foreign policy ever since. After Pelosi's performance on Sunday, that credibility remains very much in doubt.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN': Just when we thought the news from the Democrats' midterm elections debacle couldn't get any worse, along comes Gray Davis. It seems that the newly reelected California governor has been emboldened by his success (and his fellow Democrats' failures) at the polls. So much so, in fact, that Davis—who only a year ago seemed like a certain one-term governor thanks to his sorry performance during California's energy crisis—now sounds like a man with his eyes on the White House. A recent article by *The New York Times*' Adam Nagourney reports that Davis, "who *had* [emphasis ours] been discredited ... chortled as he pointed to his eventual victory to suggest what his colleagues in Washington might have done differently." Davis told Nagourney: "Unlike Washington, the Democratic Party stands for something in California. ... If you're in Congress, it's hard to go back to your constituents and say, 'Look what the Democrats have done.' You could do that in California." But, before Davis starts measuring the Oval Office for curtains, let's look more closely at what his California constituents actually think of him. Facing a woefully inept Republican opponent in Bill Simon—whose campaign National Republican Congressional Committee chairman Tom Davis called the single "worst-run race in the country"—Davis won by a mere 5 percent. This, despite the fact that he raised $65 million and outspent Simon nearly three to one. Davis received 1.4 million less votes than he did in 1998 and was outpolled by three down-ticket Democratic incumbents. Meanwhile, a recent poll shows that 60 percent of California voters hold an unfavorable impression of Davis, and 61 percent don't like the way he has handled his job as governor. It sounds like the basis of a pretty good presidential run to us. ■

[illegible] | Bruce Reed

SCAVENGER HUNT

U.N. inspectors arrive in Iraq. Saddam's welcome: "If you find any weapons, I'm happy to show you how they work."

STOCKS 'R' US

Stock analyst Grubman says he pushed stock in return for top exec helping get his twins into preschool. Hillary was wrong: It takes a CEO.

PAY ANY PRICE

Woodward book says U.S. won in Afghanistan by bribing warlords. Rove takes credit: "We've got the same strategy for the Teamsters here at home."

NO MIDDLEMAN

Administration announces plan to contract out federal workforce: "We've already got them working for the private sector—they might as well get paid for it!"

TEA PARTY

Democrats award 2004 convention to Boston. Party's thinking: Bush can't win all 50 states if Dem carries Massachusetts.

GREAT OUTDOORS

Bush raises limit on snowmobiles in national parks. GOP reaction: "Now we won't have to look for drill sites on foot!"

KIDS THESE DAYS

HHS Inspector General Janet Rehnquist investigated for keeping firearm in her office. Chief Justice forced to cancel "Bring Your Daughter's Gun to Work Day."

BENCH PRESS

Scalia speaks at Federalist Society's 20th anniversary. New this year: Free black robes with every membership.

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White House Watch

Itchy

By Ryan Lizza

As the United Nations moved toward approval of Resolution 1441 earlier this month, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, became obsessed with a passage buried in the document. It was a couple of days before the November 8 vote, and holdouts like Russia, still skeptical of the U.S. draft, were combing the document for "hidden triggers" that the United States could use to justify military action or for loose phraseology that they could use to validate claims of Iraqi noncooperation. Lavrov thought he found something alarming in paragraph eight: "Iraq shall not take or threaten hostile acts directed against any representative or personnel of the United Nations or the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] or of any Member State taking action to uphold any Council resolution." The language was meant to caution Saddam Hussein against harming the U.N.'s chemical and biological weapons inspectors and the IAEA's nuclear sleuths. But why was the phrase "or of any Member State" in there?

The Russian representative, as well as several other Security Council members, worried that the phrase was a backdoor way for the United States to cite aggression against U.S. and British aircrafts patrolling Iraq's no-fly zones as evidence of Saddam's noncompliance with the new U.N. mandate. The no-fly zones have long been controversial among Iraq's friends on the Council because they are not authorized by the United Nations but, rather, justified as a way to enforce resolutions ordering Saddam not to repress Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south. Says a Security Council diplomat, "The Russian ambassador was muttering about the 'institutionalization of the no-fly zones.'" To mollify him, the British made a personal assurance that paragraph eight had nothing to do with coalition aircraft. "Otherwise, the Russians would not have voted for the resolution," says a diplomat. After the formal Security Council vote, Lavrov read a statement insisting that paragraph eight referred only to personnel detailed to the inspection teams.

Unlike the British, the Americans never made a similar guarantee to the Russians. And, this week, interpreting paragraph eight caused the first major split both within the Bush administration and between the U.S. and the Security Council over what sort of Iraqi violations amount to a material breach of the new resolution. When asked if Iraq's firing on the aircraft in the no-fly zones constituted such a breach, the State Department's spokesman, Richard Boucher, played down the attacks. "It would probably take some kind of analysis by the lawyers of the resolution," he said. But, a few days later, the White House decided to take a more aggressive posture and announced that "firing upon our aircraft in the no-fly zone, or British aircraft, is a violation. It is a material breach."

Still, the White House knows that no other member state shares its interpretation, not even the United Kingdom, which co-sponsored the resolution and is the only other country whose pilots are at risk. "The British have said that, even if one of their planes is shot down, it wouldn't be material breach," says a State Department official. "For the U.K., fourteen forty-one was about one last chance to achieve disarmament," says a British diplomat. "It was not about no-fly zones. If it was, we would not have had a fifteen to nil vote." That's why the administration, while technically defining attacks on coalition pilots as a material breach, has no plans to refer the incidents to the Security Council now. The best President Bush can do is reserve the right to cite the attacks later on, once a pattern of postresolution Iraqi intransigence has been documented. That may be just as well. The provocations will strengthen the case against Iraq that the Bush administration will eventually bring before the Council, and, for now, they give U.S. forces an excuse to strike valuable targets. "It's in their interest to degrade the Iraqi air defenses," says a Security Council diplomat. "They should be happy!"

This week's international debate over the definition of material breach is a harbinger of things to come. In fact, the debate over paragraph eight will be nothing compared with the coming war over paragraphs three and four. Those paragraphs mandate that, by December 8, Iraq must provide the inspectors with "a currently accurate, full, and complete declaration" of every aspect of its chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile programs. For weeks, administration hard-liners skeptical about new inspections have argued that the smallest lie or omission in the declaration should serve as evidence of Iraqi noncompliance and as a trigger for military action. If the new resolution is to be different from the old ones, they insist, Saddam must understand that anything less than a 100 percent confession of his proscribed weapons programs will produce his overthrow. Some Bush officials hope that U.S. intelligence will easily prove inaccuracies in the declaration and forestall the drawn-out process of actual inspections. "There is a vigorous fight going on with respect to this," says one person close to the more hawkish members of Bush's national security team.

But Colin Powell and the State Department already seem to have won that fight. Despite Bush's tough rhetoric on Wednesday in Prague—"Deception this time will not be tolerated"—State's interpretation is that even the most bogus declaration cannot by itself equal material breach. Paragraph four says that "false statements or omissions in the declarations submitted by Iraq pursuant to this resolution *and* failure by Iraq at any time to comply with, and cooperate fully in the implementation of, this resolution shall constitute a further material breach [emphasis added]." State's reading of this paragraph—the only one in the resolution in which material breach is defined—is that lies in the disclosure must be accompanied by noncooperation with inspections to reach material breach. "The way the resolution is structured," Powell said recently in an interview with the BBC, "if the

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declaration is false and if there are efforts to deny the inspectors the access that they need, then that constitutes, in and of itself, as a matter of fact, a material breach." His deputy, Richard Armitage, echoed this view last week in another TV interview: "In theory, a false declaration could be a material breach. But I think, in fact, it would have to be false declarations combined with attempts at obfuscation, or concealment, or blocking inspectors." Other administration officials agree. "A sloppy and vague disclosure won't constitute material breach," says a State Department official. "Their view is to put Hans Blix in charge."

To the hawks' dismay, this is also the consensus view in the Security Council. "There is no material breach until Iraq has not cooperated in the verification of the declaration," says a Western diplomat who was closely involved with the negotiations. "Merely telling lies in the declaration is not in itself a casus belli." In fact, the presence of the word "and" in paragraph four was key to getting a unanimous vote. "The British were extremely specific about this," adds one diplomat. "[U.K. Ambassador Jeremy] Greenstock stressed it and stressed it." The Brits concur. "It's the two things together," says a British official. "To get to the level of material breach, we're talking about a lie in the declaration *and* noncooperation" with the inspectors. As long as there is cooperation, even if the inspectors discover that the declaration was false, there is no material breach.

This interpretation, of course, gives Saddam zero incentive to be forthcoming in the declaration. Why should he provide Blix with any clues when he is only really going to be judged by his cooperation with inspections on the ground? All of which means that a war may not be nearly as imminent as many believe. "There was a flurry of concern at the end of the resolution process over at DOD," says one State Department official. "They realized this was a serious weapons-inspections process. . . . It could drag on for months." In fact, Rolf Ekeus, the former chief arms inspector, has said it could take two years before inspectors find anything. For the hawks, Saddam's December 8 declaration may be their last chance to stop that process. Says one hard-liner, "If you want to have action on this issue this winter, your only hope is the declaration." ■

Tel Aviv Dispatch

Exit Pols

By Yossi Klein Halevi

On a wall in the office of this country's newest party, *Yisrael Acheret* ("A Different Israel"), hangs a poster with the images of David Ben-Gurion and Menachem Begin. The juxtaposition of the founder of the Labor Party and the founder of the Likud Party is not coincidental: The message of this youth-driven reformist party is that the old left-right divide that has dominated Israeli discourse is over. Instead, party members say, what is important now is freeing Israeli politics from sectarianism, corruption, and mediocrity. "The debate over peace and territories isn't relevant anymore," says party activist Eitan Ginsburg, a law student. Adds party spokesman Itai Ben-Horin: "The new generation doesn't believe in left or right. Politicians used peace as an excuse not to deal with what kind of a country we live in."

The volunteers who work late nights at Yisrael Acheret's little office in central Tel Aviv speak with passion about their demands for a government made up of professionals, rather than politicians, and for Knesset members who are held accountable by the public. It's easy to dismiss them as naive, which is what the media, focused on the imminent Ariel Sharon–Benjamin Netanyahu showdown, has done. But their message—promoted on banners around the country that proclaim, WE WANT A DIFFERENT ISRAEL—is resonating. At the party's founding conference last week, over 3,000 people showed up, an impressive turnout in a small nation. One poll commissioned by the party claims it will win three seats in the upcoming election before it has even explained itself to the general public.

The timing of Yisrael Acheret—Israel's first anti-political political party—couldn't be better. Arguably no election has left Israelis as apathetic as this one. Only 51 percent say they'll definitely vote—this in a country that normally produces close to 90 percent turnout. Partly, this apathy is due to the realization that the ideological outcome of this election is a foregone conclusion, and the only question is whether the next prime minister will be Sharon or Netanyahu. Partly, too, it's the fact that the country already had what it wanted—a unity government headed by Sharon—and finds a wartime resurgence of political infighting an indulgence.

But, more than apathy, there's a growing revulsion for a political system that encourages shrillness over rational debate, extortion by small parties, and widespread corruption, such as the routine violation of campaign contribution laws. Public approval of the Knesset—barely 20 percent—is at an all-time low; fully 59 percent of the public believes that "most" Israeli politicians are corrupt.

Revulsion against the political establishment has long been a force in Israeli politics, but it is now intensifying. In 1977, a series of Labor Party scandals helped bring the Likud to power for the first time. In the mid-'90s, outrage against ultra-Orthodox political blackmail led to the replacement of a one-ballot vote, with separate ballots for prime minister and for parliament. The new system was supposed to strengthen the prime minister's ability to control his coalition; instead, it backfired and strengthened tribalism. Israelis used the prime minister ballot to vote for national concerns and the parliamentary ballot to indulge schismatic temptations, boosting small parties' power. So now, Israel is reverting to the one-ballot system, a demoralizing admission that the system seems incapable of reforming itself.

The terrorist war has only deepened Israelis' revulsion

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toward the political class. Political mediocrity seems grotesque when juxtaposed with images like the one last week of a father throwing himself on the graves of his two children, murdered in the terrorist attack on Kibbutz Metzer. The tragic and the farcical compete for Israeli attention. Sephardi populist David Levy has just rejoined the Likud after quitting three Likud-led governments in the last decade, while Dan Meridor, the talented but hopelessly indecisive ex-Likudnik, is once again equivocating over which party to join.

Worse than the pettiness is the increasingly revolting meanness of political discourse. Suppressed for a time by the terror attacks, Israel's secular-Orthodox rift has reemerged. Shas's spiritual leader, Ovadiah Yosef, has promised to open the gates of heaven to anyone who votes for his party, prompting newspaper cartoons comparing him to Islamic clerics promising heaven to suicide bombers. Inevitably, in a period of popular revulsion, the excesses of one fringe reinforce its opposite. The Shinui Party—whose single commitment is containing ultra-Orthodox power—may double its current six seats. Shinui is benefiting not only from anti-Orthodox sentiment but also from the backlash against political opportunism: The party is widely respected for keeping its election promise not to join any government formed with ultra-Orthodox parties.

The craving for principled politics also explains the Labor Party's suicidal infatuation with Haifa mayor and ultra-dove Amram Mitzna. As the war pushes the country further right—over 50 percent of Israelis now identify themselves as right-wing, compared with a mere 30 percent in 1999—Labor has shifted far left, electing as its party head this week one of the last Oslo true believers, a man who faults Ehud Barak for not conceding enough at Camp David and says that Yasir Arafat remains a potential negotiating partner. Mitzna owes his popularity more to his reputation for honesty and courage than to political ideology—and most of all to the fact that he is not Benjamin Ben-Eliezer or Haim Ramon, the two clubhouse politicians who were his rivals for party leadership.

Still, that won't help Mitzna in the national elections on January 28. If Sharon beats Netanyahu in the Likud primaries on November 28, he will likely transform the Likud into Israel's largest party—almost doubling its current 19 seats, according to polls. The expected low voter turnout will hit Labor especially hard: Far more Labor supporters than Likudniks don't plan to vote.

Sharon would almost certainly defeat any opponent on the left. His personal success has been to convince the public that he is one of the very few politicians who place the national interest over their own. And his political success has been to embody the sensibility of the new right-wing majority, which is hard-line on security but not on territory—committed to winning the war against terrorism but not to preventing the eventual emergence of a Palestinian state.

Some good may yet emerge from this unexpected and unnecessary election. According to polls, Shas will lose nearly half of its 17 seats, restoring the ultra-Orthodox community, which is about 6 percent of the population, to its proper political dimensions. Expanding the Likud at Shas's expense could offer Sharon an unprecedented opportunity to create a largely secular unity government. And, though Mitzna says he won't join a unity government unless it agrees to evacuate settlements, the impending war with Iraq could make unity unavoidable. Sharon has promised that the next unity government will be smaller than the last—a hint, say Sharon intimates, that he intends to exclude the ultra-Orthodox parties. A secular unity government would address the Israeli majority's main domestic grievance and a major source of the political revulsion: the distorted relationship between the ultra-Orthodox and the state.

No less urgently, Israelis crave a political culture of personal responsibility. Israelis want politicians who admit their mistakes. This is no trivial matter in a country that has lurched from one ideologically inspired disaster to the next—from invading Lebanon and massively settling the territories, to retreating from Lebanon under Hezbollah fire, and importing thousands of terrorists to the territories. Labor may well remain in opposition until it admits empowering Arafat was a mistake, signaling a break not just with a failed policy but with the politics of covering up failure.

Most of all, Israelis want a new politics that doesn't promise facile solutions—not Mitzna's proposed unilateral withdrawal, which will invite more terrorism, nor Netanyahu's proposed expulsion of Arafat, which will create a clash with Washington. In the short term, that new Israeli maturity bolsters Sharon, who is appealing precisely because he offers patience, persistence, and national unity. In the long term, the post-ideological restlessness will produce more initiatives like Yisrael Acheret, helping Israel to redefine itself beyond the political and cultural schisms that have so distorted its political system. ■

The White House abandons L.A.

Ill Treatment

By JONATHAN COHN

LOS ANGELES

THE WOMEN'S CLINIC at the Hubert Humphrey Health Center may not be posh, but it's not unpleasant, either. The exam rooms are clean and reasonably well-equipped; a few even feature their own computer consoles. Attractive pink wallpaper lines the walls, except in the children's waiting area, which beckons youngsters with primary colors and a colorful bead and wire maze. Patients sit quietly as a receptionist calls out names, one every few minutes, without

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resorting to a loudspeaker. It is, in other words, a reasonably civilized atmosphere for what turns out to be reasonably civilized medical care.

That might sound like faint praise, until you consider that the clinic operates in one of the bleakest tracts of South Central Los Angeles. From the clinic's front door, it's just 20 blocks to the corner of Florence and Normandie, epicenter of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Storefront signs such as SE ACCEPTAN ESTAMPILLAS are testimony to the enduring destitution. Wiry truants hang out on street corners at midday, hiding their hands inside their baggy athletic pants to conceal drugs or weapons as they approach cars pulling up at the curb. At a sprawling, two-story housing project a few blocks to the clinic's south, a metal picket fence surrounding the complex has its spikes turned inward, as if to keep the residents from getting out. The poverty rate in this section of South Central, 40 percent, is Los Angeles County's highest; so is the incidence of most violent crimes.

There's one other category in which this area leads the county: illness. Asthma and hypertension have reached alarming proportions; the age-adjusted mortality rates for diabetes and cervical cancer here are double the rate for Californians as a whole. Although there are many reasons for this—everything from eating too much fatty food to breathing mold-infested air—a major factor is lack of access to health care. One-quarter of South Central's residents say they have no regular source of health care, which isn't surprising given that half have no health insurance. The only place where most of these uninsured residents can get decent medical care is at the hospitals and clinics run by Los Angeles County. And there aren't nearly enough of these facilities to handle the load.

The county's emergency rooms, for instance, are so overcrowded that they turn away incoming ambulances 40 percent of the time. Even those patients who make it into the E.R. at USC/County Hospital, the county system's hub, typically wait eight or nine hours to be seen, longer on weekends. The strain on other hospital wards gets less public attention, but it's no less severe. "We have patients routinely waiting on my own service up to twelve days to get an EKG of their heart," says Scott Selco, a young neurologist at USC/County. "It's not a test to satisfy our curiosity; our treatment decisions rest on that test." Gall bladder operations, biopsies, colonoscopies—all but the most urgent procedures have waiting lists months long, even though it means many patients will deteriorate and end up back in the overwhelmed E.R.s. Nobody thinks the L.A. County system has the capacity to deal with the sort of surge a major epidemic might produce, to say nothing of a bioterrorist attack.

And what's true of USC/County is true of the local facilities, too. Even at the Humphrey Center's women's clinic, it can take several weeks to get an appointment, plus months beyond that to get routine screenings like mammograms or colonoscopies. An energetic gynecologist I met there said she had recently diagnosed a patient with advanced cervical cancer. The woman hadn't gotten regular pap smears and gynecological exams, a common situation in a neighborhood where unpredictable work hours and unreliable day care make it difficult to keep appointments. By the time the patient finally came in, the doctor said, her uterus "looked like ground beef." The doctor ordered a hysterectomy, but, with no insurance, the patient had to go a county hospital—and onto a two-month waiting list.

GIVEN THAT WHAT'S happening in South Central is happening in low-income communities across Los Angeles, you might think the county would be expanding its network of clinics and hospitals. But, as the number of Los Angelenos without health insurance swells past 2.5 million, a number that constitutes almost one-third of the county's entire population, nobody is talking about expansion. Instead, this summer the county board of supervisors voted to close clinics, sell one of its six hospitals, and radically downsize two more. It plans to vote on more cuts in January, perhaps shuttering two major hospitals and several more clinics.

The problem is money: The county medical system is losing hundreds of millions of dollars each year. In November, as a stopgap measure, voters approved a property tax hike that will help keep trauma centers open. And the state, despite a severe budget crunch, is expected to chip in a little extra money as well. But the magnitude of Los Angeles's problem has historically required help from somebody with deeper pockets: the federal government. During the 1990s, President Clinton spared Los Angeles severe cuts by authorizing more than $2 billion in bailouts. But now the Clinton money is running out. And, while the Bush administration has authorized far larger assistance packages for the airline industry and giant farm conglomerates, it has been decidedly less generous toward Los Angeles's medical system. "We don't want to create a meltdown of the L.A. County hospitals, but I have to explain to Houston and New York and St. Louis and Nashville why L.A. County is getting a special deal," Tom Scully, President Bush's director of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid services, told the *Los Angeles Times* late this summer. "I don't think it's our responsibility to just write them a check and bail them out."

Scully has a point: It would be strange to single out Los Angeles for assistance when so many other communities are suffering. To balance its budget, Tennessee is pushing about 160,000 off the Medicaid rolls this year; most of them will end up uninsured. In Illinois, funding cuts that take effect January 1, 2003, will likely force a number of Chicago clinics, serving thousands of low-income residents, to close. Overall, 41 states are reducing Medicaid spending for 2003, according to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation. What will these cuts mean? This spring, a study by the Institute of Medicine, an independent research organization, suggested that as many as 18,000 adults without insurance die prematurely each year because of their failure to get the kinds of tests and treatments people with good insurance take for granted. As states slash funding for their medical safety net, that number will almost certainly rise.

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But the fact that so many other communities are in the same position as Los Angeles doesn't suggest, as Scully says, that the administration should do nothing. On the contrary, the federal government ought to be helping all of them. Instead, the White House has quietly drained money from existing federal health insurance programs while proposing to make the estate tax cut permanent. As for pleas to help the states through extra Medicaid money or some other direct subsidy, they've gone about as far as the pleas to help Los Angeles County—which is to say, nowhere.

NOBODY CONSIDERS THE Los Angeles public health system ideal. It has evolved haphazardly, beset by corruption and inefficiency ever since its creation in the 1960s. But, even allowing for the waste, it has always been underfunded. Assistance from Washington has never completely made up for the burden of handling so many uninsured patients, and, in the '90s, the financial situation became a crisis as the number of county residents without insurance jumped past two million. When the prospect of universal health insurance died in 1994, the county asked Clinton to come to its rescue, and he did—in the form of a $1.2 billion, five-year assistance package. "It would have been criminal to permit these clinics to close and all of this crisis to develop," Clinton said in 1995, as he announced the bailout.

That money came with strings attached: In exchange for the cash, Los Angeles County promised to revamp its system, gradually reducing the use of expensive inpatient hospitals through more preventative care at outpatient clinics. Yet by 1999, when the bailout was nearing its end, the county wasn't even close to meeting its goals. Critics blamed the county's board of supervisors for dragging their heels on reform—i.e., for coddling public employee unions or refusing to eliminate unnecessary facilities in their respective districts—but the story was more complex than that. An independent report by the Urban Institute suggested some key mitigating circumstances: While inpatient care had dropped only slightly, that was partly because the backlog of unmet need was so large; as the county pushed people out of the hospital, more rushed in. And, whatever its other failings, the county had followed through on one promise: the creation of a Public/Private Partnership plan, under which it subsidized independent, nonprofit clinics that in many cases provided better care than the county-owned units.

Maybe it was recognition of these extenuating circumstances and modest advances. Or maybe it was just politics—namely that Clinton wasn't willing to abandon so many Democratic voters in the middle of Al Gore's presidential campaign. Whatever the reason, in the waning days of his presidency, Clinton authorized another bailout, albeit with stricter oversight. In return, county supervisors promised to do better, eventually giving their newly appointed health czar—Thomas Garthwaite, formerly of the Veterans Administration (V.A.) health system—a broad mandate to radically restructure the county network.

At the V.A., Garthwaite had succeeded in streamlining the bureaucratic behemoth, promoting preventative care, and consolidating medical records. In Los Angeles, Garthwaite sketched out plans for a similar transformation: a system under which every county patient would get an electronic health-record card that carried their medical records on it from visit to visit. Then, cognizant of charges that the county was unwilling to show any fiscal discipline, he also proposed a plan under which the county would downsize some of its hospitals, sell off its rehabilitation hospital altogether, and close several clinics. Despite the opposition of activists and the public employee unions, county supervisors backed the plan, and the cuts began taking effect in late August.

Although Garthwaite argued that efficiency gains would soften the blow of these cuts, one clear purpose was to sound a public alarm and convince their would-be saviors—Scully and Bush—that they were serious about reengineering this time around. With the public, at least, the gambit worked. Swayed by TV ads portraying paramedics desperately seeking open E.R.s, two weeks ago county voters approved a referendum to raise their property taxes in order to finance trauma care. It's expected to be about $168 million per year for the county, enough to cover 40 percent of the expected deficit. In addition, after months of ignoring the county's plight, Governor Gray Davis recently hinted that he was planning to submit a health care assistance plan to a special session of the California legislature.

BUT THINGS HAVEN'T gone nearly so well in Washington. During the spring and summer, Scully said repeatedly that he had no interest in writing more checks to L.A. County. At most, he said, the federal government could provide a one-time-only infusion of about $150 million in "bridge money"—enough to pay off about one-third of the county deficit for a single year. After some not-so-delicate prodding by Los Angeles Representative Jane Harman, Scully agreed to visit Los Angeles shortly after the election. But, even during that visit, his message remained the same: "I have no plans to be a knight in shining armor."

A few months ago, that hard-nosed position might have been defensible. Why should the federal government help L.A. when the county and the state are unwilling to help themselves? But now the voters have done their part. So have Garthwaite and the county supervisors. Even Governor Davis seems ready to do his. Suddenly, it's the Bush administration alone that's walking away from the problem.

And not only walking away. The administration is actually making the problem worse through its other actions. One of the underreported stories of the last two years is the administration's gradual reduction of Medicaid money for the uninsured. Over the last decade or so, states have exploited Upper Payment Limits—a Medicaid provision designed to help subsidize care for the uninsured—in order to collect extra money from the federal government and then channel

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it for things like roads, schools, or debt repayment. The Clinton administration started cracking down on this in the late '90s. But at least a few states really were using that money for health care—and California was one of them. Now the Bush administration has drastically reduced that money, costing Los Angeles an estimated $125 million per year.

Which would be fine if the Bush administration were doing something else to help cover the cost of serving the low-income uninsured. But, while the Democratic Senate this year approved a bill that would increase the federal matching rate for Medicaid, thereby giving the states (and, indirectly, places like Los Angeles) money to get through the next few years, Bush has opposed it. Similarly, funding for the State Children's Health Insurance Program will start tapering off next year. Created under Clinton, that program played a key role in keeping the number of people without insurance nationwide from climbing in the late '90s. Yet the White House has not proposed even maintaining current funding. On the contrary, according to a recent report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the latest Bush S-CHIP budget would force over half a million children *out* of the program over the next five years.

Tellingly, the administration's primary effort to reduce the ranks of the uninsured consists of a proposed tax credit for people who buy insurance themselves. It's worth just $1,000: According to a survey of health insurance plans by the advocacy group Families USA, on average, that's barely one-fifth of what it would cost a healthy middle-aged woman to get a decent policy—i.e., one that covers basics such as prescription drugs. Plus, there's no mechanism to make sure insurance companies don't simply refuse policies to those people with serious medical conditions. That's why most studies suggest the primary beneficiaries of such a break will be people who already buy health insurance—not the people on waiting lists to see doctors in L.A. County.

So what happens to Los Angeles if the rest of the cuts go through? It will mean even longer waits, more delayed treatments, and ultimately more people suffering medical problems—something already happening, thanks to the first round of downsizing. "We used to get about ten new patients a day showing up at our doors," says Roland Polencia, the director of the Clinica Oscar Romero, in the heavily immigrant, heavily Latino Pico Union neighborhood just west of downtown. "Now it's forty to fifty, and that's happened literally in the past few weeks." Back in South Central, the closure of the Compton Clinic has sent patients trudging across town to the Humphrey Center, although not everybody makes the trip, given that it's 20 minutes by car but as much as two hours by bus. "I have clients with gall bladder problems," says Loretta Jones, director of Healthy African-American Families. "They have discomfort. They have pain. They can't sit on the bus for two hours. They just end up staying home." That's just one reason the closures are bound to press county E.R.s even more, even with the new trauma tax in place. The cuts will "make this winter a scary time of year," says veteran pediatrician Irma Gonzalez, who moonlights at the USC/County pediatric E.R.

Alas, political pressure for more assistance may not build until the diseases of the inner city spread into the suburbs. "Look, I live in a community that's affluent. A lot of people don't have health insurance at McDonald's, where I take my kids. If [they're] not screened for T.B., hepatitis, and so on, guess who's vulnerable? We are, the people who live in these communities," says Carl Coan, president of the Eisner Pediatric and Family Medical Center, located near downtown.

Coan is right about the suburbs' vulnerability, and, sadly, he may also be right that it will take an epidemic to jolt Washington into action. After all, the public health situation in the United States is already critical. Nationally, the uninsured now number 43 million and are growing fast. Yet the White House still has "no plans to be a knight in shining armor." Let's hope it gets some before it's too late. ■

Eliot Spitzer's message for the Democrats.

Consumer Party

By NOAM SCHEIBER

GEORGE ZICARELLI IS the kind of voter that must give his party fits. A longtime resident of New York City's Upper East Side, he is a self-described "conservative Democrat" who has now voted for Republican Governor George Pataki in two successive elections—in 1998 and again this November. "I like Pataki on a fiscal level," Zicarelli explains.

But Zicarelli did vote for at least one Democrat on the statewide ballot this year: Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. Zicarelli, it turns out, lost several hundred thousand dollars in the stock market after his broker at Salomon Smith Barney encouraged him to invest in stocks recommended by the firm's star telecom analyst, Jack Grubman. As a result, Zicarelli has derived no small amount of satisfaction from watching Spitzer investigate analysts such as Grubman and Merrill Lynch's Henry Blodget for promoting stocks they didn't believe in. In fact, Zicarelli is so grateful for Spitzer's activism on behalf of investors that when I asked him who his

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favorite politician is, he hesitated briefly before conceding that, "to be honest, if it was between Pataki and Spitzer, I'd have to vote for Spitzer."

Zicarelli, in short, is the sort of middle-of-the-road voter many Democrats failed to impress on Election Day but whom Spitzer won in droves en route to racking up 66 percent of the vote in his reelection campaign. Spitzer won 2.5 million votes in all—over one million more than the state's Democratic candidate for governor, Carl McCall, and almost half a million more than Pataki. As Democratic political consultant Richard Schrader told *The New York Times* two weeks ago, Spitzer "is the one politician nationally who has been able to capitalize on the issue of corporate misconduct."

It's not as though other politicians didn't try. National Democrats responded to the collapse of Enron and WorldCom by condemning the corporate world as greedy and corrupt, and then assailing Republicans for their corporate ties. In late June, Majority Leader Tom Daschle declared on the Senate floor that "it is as if the line between right and wrong ... was so little enforced that it became blurred. Bringing it back into focus—as Enron's collapse did—revealed more than a few businesses standing on the wrong side." One week later, on "Face the Nation," he made the connection to the Bush administration: "We've even seen [a permissive atmosphere] in relationships that some of the members of the administration have had with their own corporate roles and the responsibilities they had in the corporate sector." Daschle's Democratic counterpart in the House, Dick Gephardt, went even further. "I think we're in a world of George Orwell, only Big Brother is not the government, Big Brother is corporate America," Gephardt alleged at a press conference shortly after WorldCom's collapse in July. "This is a Republican majority in the House that is of, by, and for corporate America."

Unfortunately for the Democrats, most Americans simply didn't agree with Gephardt's analysis. In June, on the eve of WorldCom's collapse, 38 percent of respondents to a *USA Today*/Gallup poll viewed "big business" as the greatest threat to the future of the country. But 47 percent gave that distinction to "big government." One reason is that, although Americans were outraged by the corporate scandals, more than half of them—and two-thirds of voters—own stock in some form. Any attack on business that seemed to hint at excessive fines or burdensome new regulations could therefore be seen as an attack on their personal financial interests. That helps explain why a poll released by the Pew Research Center in early September showed registered voters giving Republicans a five-point edge when it came to "dealing with corporate corruption." And it helps explain why, according to a Pew poll the following month, investors who by their own description "lost a lot of money recently"—the George Zicarellis of the world—planned to vote Republican by a six-point margin.

Spitzer grasps this problem intuitively. "I think there is some anger," he told me in a recent interview. "But nobody wants the marketplace to crumble and to see their 401(k) drop even more." Spitzer's solution hasn't been to do nothing; it has been to focus more narrowly on the harm done to investors—who, after all, were the people hurt by the scandals in the first place. Spitzer argued, in effect, that buying stock is in a fundamental way like buying any other product: The buyer needs quality information in order to decide among numerous options. If for some reason investors had been getting misleading information, they couldn't possibly have made intelligent decisions.

Like other Democrats, Spitzer advocated reform. But, unlike other Democrats, Spitzer's reforms weren't designed to punish or rein in inherently corrupt executives. They were designed to give essentially amoral corporations incentives to better serve their customers. Spitzer, in other words, wasn't anti-business so much as pro-consumer. And that made all the difference in the world.

SPITZER'S RELUCTANCE TO demonize business follows from his biography. The youngest child of a New York City real estate magnate, Spitzer—after Harvard Law School and a stint in the Manhattan District Attorney's office—spent two years working on mergers and acquisitions at the corporate behemoth Skadden Arps. In many ways, he resembles the young, Harvard-trained corporate lawyers who wrote many of the federal statutes that govern the financial markets today. New Dealers like Tommy Corcoran and Benjamin Cohen had lost money in the market crash of 1929, but, in the words of one contemporary, "They want[ed] to reform the system, not take revenge on it." Spitzer, likewise, is a reformer with a large personal stake in preserving "the system." He is fond of joking that "[h]alf his friends are investment bankers, and the other half are lawyers who represent investment bankers," as *Fortune* magazine recently put it. Spitzer's friend, the hedge-fund manager and financial commentator Jim Cramer, points out that "he's really one of them. He could have been general counsel of Merrill." In our interview, Spitzer confided that he'd seriously considered a career in business himself. "There's always been a piece of me that wants to be in the private sector. There is an element of dynamism and risk-taking that is very appealing, to actually be out there in the business world."

So, when Spitzer squeaked into office by fewer than 30,000 votes in 1998 (out of nearly 4.5 million cast), it was only natural that he'd look for an uncontroversial way to pursue his reform agenda. He found it in consumer protection. Some of his early cases were downright middling—one investigation focused on whether Pfizer overstated the effectiveness of its lice-treatment products—but others were bolder. Spitzer took the lead, for example, in a multistate price-fixing suit alleging that CD manufacturers had colluded with retailers to bilk consumers out of nearly $500 million.

Whatever the size of the case, though, Spitzer's approach was reliably pragmatic. He staked out an aggressive position among the 18 state attorneys general suing Microsoft for anti-competitive behavior shortly after entering office. But, when the Bush Justice Department reached an agreement

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with the company after its court-ordered breakup had been overturned, Spitzer led a group of attorneys general who signed on over the bitter objections of their more hard-line colleagues. "I stood to gain more by negotiating with Microsoft if I could get something from them; whereas the other argument was to litigate and ask for more and get nothing," Spitzer says. "That's what happened to the litigating states."

Spitzer's centrist approach earned him the affection of conservative editorial pages around the country. *The Orange County Register* even held him up as an example to California Attorney General Bill Lockyer, who, it complained, was "continuing his quixotic antitrust attack on Microsoft Corp., with taxpayers picking up the legal tab." But Spitzer's real innovation was to extend his pragmatic, consumer-oriented approach beyond conventional consumer issues. "I hear the derisive comments that somehow a consumer case is less intellectually stimulating," he told me. "But I think we have expanded the mandate of the office beyond that traditional image." Perhaps the most significant of these cases involved General Electric (G.E.). In the 1940s, two of the company's upstate facilities began dumping a class of compound called polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, into the Hudson River. The federal government finally banned PCBs in 1976, after research demonstrated that they could be cancer causing in sufficient quantities. But by this point there were already one million pounds of PCBs lying at the bottom of the Hudson. Despite periodic prodding from environmental activists and state and federal officials, G.E. never did anything about them.

Enter Spitzer. In November 1999, he announced that the state was suing G.E. over the PCBs. The move was fraught with risk. At the time, the company stood at the very top of the business world, its CEO, Jack Welch, held up as a hero of American enterprise. In this context, few believed Spitzer would be able to paint G.E. as an evil colossus out to harm the residents of upstate New York (particularly since many of those residents actually worked for G.E.). But, given the tenuous scientific evidence surrounding the case, winning a claim based on the harm done to wildlife and human beings would have required just that.

So Spitzer took another route altogether. He argued only that the accumulation of PCB sediment in the Hudson had rendered parts of the river impossible to navigate. Spitzer didn't even threaten the company with a massive damage award. He simply asked G.E. to cover the costs of the dredging.

The strategy proved to be inspired. Spitzer tapped a reservoir of public support by casting the despoiling of the river as essentially a consumer issue: Upstate businesses that depended on the river were being deprived of its use. According to his pollster, Jef Pollock, "[Spitzer's] numbers shot up upstate, where it's really hard for a New York City person to become known." That gave Spitzer a mandate to press on even after a federal judge ruled that the suit couldn't go forward before the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had studied the matter. And many observers feel that Spitzer's pressure helped build momentum for the dredging, which the EPA eventually ruled in favor of. "Some people don't buy the health issue and the contamination-of-fish issue," says Rich Schiafo, a spokesman for the environmental group Scenic Hudson. "Some of those same people said, 'Yeah, part of the economic engine of the Hudson has been damaged.'"

GIVEN SPITZER'S PRO-CONSUMER agenda, it's not surprising that he suspected his office might have a role to play after the spectacular meltdown of companies like Enron helped bleed investors of billions of dollars. He found that role in July 2001, when a Queens pediatrician named Debases Kanjilal won a surprising concession from Merrill Lynch.

In January 2000, Kanjilal had instructed Michael Healy, his Merrill Lynch broker, to take his daughter's college savings out of name-brand stocks like America Online and Microsoft and invest them in the speculative telecom sector. But, by May, the telecom stocks had begun to tank. So Kanjilal did what any panicky investor would: He called Healy and asked him to sell.

That didn't happen. Instead, Kanjilal said in an arbitration claim, Healy encouraged him to ride out the dip. According to Kanjilal, Healy would cite the bullish buy recommendation that Henry Blodget, Merrill's star telecom analyst, had placed on the stocks. Kanjilal also said that Healy once even claimed Blodget had personally assured him that one stock, for a company called InfoSpace, would recover to $100 per share from its then-price of $60. (Merrill Lynch denies that Healy made these statements.) By the time Kanjilal finally sold the InfoSpace stock in December, its share price had plummeted to $11. His overall portfolio, once worth $1.2 million, stood at a meager $95,000.

Not surprisingly, Kanjilal blamed Healy and Blodget for the losses he racked up between May and December. "He felt he had been misled by the top analyst at Merrill," says Kanjilal's lawyer, Jake Zamansky. So Zamansky filed a $500,000 claim against Merrill with the New York Stock Exchange, alleging that Blodget had been pressured to talk up a loser like InfoSpace because Merrill's investment-banking arm counted the company's parent as a client. Merrill quickly caved and agreed to a $400,000 settlement before the case even entered the arbitration phase.

The settlement sent tremors up and down Wall Street. According to Brad Hintz, a longtime brokerage analyst at Sanford Bernstein, it was not the $400,000 figure itself that was particularly eye-opening. "The issue was the eighty cents on the dollar," he says. Most settlements between clients and firms tend to hover at somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of the reported loss. That Merrill was paying 80 percent so early in the process seemed to indicate the company had something to hide. Or, as Spitzer put it to me, "There are two risks that a company faces in that negotiation. One is the risk of not settling and going to trial and having it all come out. The other is the risk of settling and having the settlement

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amount be noticed. They took the latter approach, hoping that it would disappear into the ether."

It didn't. Spitzer had already launched a preliminary investigation into the way companies like Merrill were promoting stocks. But the Kanjilal deal was like a bolt of lightening: By focusing on the analyst/investment-banking relationship, Spitzer could highlight the bill of goods investors had been sold without risking a much cruder attack on Wall Street as a whole.

Of course, given Merrill's sterling reputation and vast legal apparatus, the company wasn't about to roll over—particularly in the face of a challenge from a state official like Spitzer, whom Wall Street considered out of his league. The main regulator of financial markets, after all, is the federal Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). And, over the years, Wall Street firms have developed a fairly cushy relationship with the commission. At the very least, says Jacob Frenkel, a securities litigator and former SEC enforcement lawyer, "Firms know where they stand with the agency."

For the first six months of the investigation, Merrill's confidence seemed well-placed: Spitzer made little progress, and the SEC was nowhere to be found. But, in January 2002, Spitzer's investigators stumbled onto e-mails in which Merrill's analysts privately derided the very same stocks they were hyping to clients. Spitzer couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the documents himself. "Get me the damn e-mails! All of them," Spitzer told a top aide, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Before long, Spitzer's office had subpoenaed 30,000 e-mails, which his lawyers spent the next several months poring through. They'd amassed a damning pile of evidence by the time they'd finished. In perhaps the most infamous message, Blodget referred to one stock as "a piece of junk." Another e-mail documented an exchange between an analyst and an institutional investor who asked, "What's so interesting about [the Internet company] GoTo except banking fees?" "Nothing," the analyst replied.

MERRILL LYNCH NOW had a real problem, and it wasted little time responding. The company brought in a partner from Skadden Arps, Spitzer's one-time employer, to handle its negotiations with the attorney general's office. It subsequently lobbied New York Senator Chuck Schumer to intervene on its behalf. Merrill even hired former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani to remind Spitzer that the firm was a vital part of the local economy and that it had returned to its Wall Street headquarters as soon as possible after the September 11 attacks. Or, as Giuliani put it to the *Journal*, "Merrill is an enormously important player in New York in the right sense."

But Merrill's lobbying campaign had almost no effect. For one thing, Spitzer has little patience for special pleaders. Cramer, a friend of Spitzer's from law school, is fond of telling a story about an abortive plan to send a proxy to their third-year criminal procedure class. "Eliot shamed me into going," Cramer recalls. "He hates system gamers." Last year, Spitzer nearly came to blows with California's Lockyer over $50 million left over from the states' tobacco settlement, which he accused Lockyer of wasting on various pet projects. (According to an article in *The American Lawyer*, Spitzer, who preferred sending the money back to the states for tobacco-related health initiatives, bellowed, "You want to step outside, that's fine! I grew up in the Bronx!")

More importantly, though, Giuliani didn't need to remind Spitzer that bringing Merrill to its knees would deal a blow to the city's economy: Spitzer never intended to bring Merrill to its knees. Far from seeing his investigation of Merrill as an assault on the firm, Spitzer saw it as a way to save Merrill from itself, since investors who repeatedly get bad information will eventually lose confidence in the market and stop providing capital to businesses altogether. This is a point Spitzer stresses repeatedly. In our interview, he used the phrase "capital formation" at least four times—as in, "ensuring that the investment banks continue their function of facilitating capital formation," and, "This is an effort to improve upon the capital-formation structure to see that it works."

But to do that Spitzer had to first convince Merrill that the alternative to negotiating with him could be disastrous. So, on April 8, Spitzer decided to play his hand, releasing the e-mails and putting Merrill unambiguously on notice. "We are revealing today evidence that demonstrates that Merrill Lynch's advice to the investing public was fundamentally flawed and skewed," Spitzer told a group of reporters. "The desire to generate more investment-banking clients overwhelmed the obligation to provide straightforward, honest analysis to the investing public, and the internal e-mails from Merrill Lynch demonstrate that."

As it happened, Merrill was the perfect foil for Spitzer. Whereas other Wall Street firms almost exclusively serve large, institutional clients who don't rely on the firms' research anyway, Merrill owes much of its reputation to its services for small-time investors—the real consumers of analysts' research. Over the years, Merrill has built one of the largest retail (i.e., small-investor) businesses on Wall Street—about 30 percent of its revenues, compared with about 15 percent for a higher-end firm like Morgan Stanley. And, as participation in the market shot up during the '90s—stock and mutual-fund ownership (excluding pension funds) rose from 23 percent in 1990 to 46 percent by the end of the decade—Merrill became a symbol of middle-class investing. Commercials featured middle-class parents coaching their children's soccer games while an announcer explained that their college savings were safe and sound with Merrill Lynch. Wall Street analysts even dubbed the firm "Mother Merrill."

All of which convinced Spitzer that the firm was particularly vulnerable to evidence that it had misled its customers. "That's the critical factor," he says. "An entity such as Merrill ... that has a more expansive retail operation, that reaches farther out to Main Street, is a different type of entity with a more vulnerable consumer." It's also why the Merrill brass knew Spitzer had the company dead to rights when he produced his evidence. Merrill's chief executive, David Komansky, later acknowledged to *The New York Times* that he "found it quite embarrassing" when he learned of Spitzer's

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documents. He subsequently conceded to employees that the firm's reputation had suffered and even apologized at a shareholders' meeting a few weeks later. By late May, Merrill had agreed to a $100 million settlement.

More significantly, the settlement forced the company to become a kind of laboratory for reform. Spitzer argued that the reason Merrill's research analysts spent so much time talking up lousy companies was that they were compensated—like most analysts on Wall Street—partly according to how many of these companies did business with the company's investment-banking arm. So, as a condition of the settlement, he insisted that the link between analysts' compensation and investment-banking business be severed.

THE MOST COMMON criticism you hear from Wall Street is that Spitzer, who's now wrapping up a similar investigation of Salomon Smith Barney (a division of the financial conglomerate Citigroup), doesn't know what he's doing. "Spitzer is a wild man," one Wall Street veteran recently complained to me. "He can do enormous damage." But the more you know about Spitzer, the more you realize that what such critics mean isn't so much "damage" as "change." In fact, Spitzer knows exactly what he's doing. A former law review editor, he has a voracious appetite for detail—he frequently tries his own cases, something unusual for a state attorney general—and a hyperrational approach to reform. As Spitzer explained the analyst/investment-banker issue to me, "It's difficult because it poses theoretical issues about who needs research, how it's used, how you pay for it, how the marketplace will get access to it. Good people sharing common objectives could still disagree about what the best formulation on that one is."

In the next couple of weeks, Spitzer and SEC enforcement chief Stephen Cutler are expected to announce a "global settlement" that will apply to all the major Wall Street firms and will, once and for all, resolve those theoretical issues. Though the details are still subject to negotiation, early reports suggest it will require companies to subsidize independent research for their retail customers—something that could cost as much as $1 billion over five years—and to hire an internal "ombudsman" to see to it that the research is distributed properly. The agreement will also use the Merrill settlement as a benchmark for levying fines, which could run into the hundreds of millions of dollars for firms like Citigroup and Credit Suisse First Boston.

Increasingly, even people on Wall Street are grudgingly conceding that Spitzer's efforts have been largely on target. There is ready acknowledgement, for example, that analysts at Merrill and Salomon breached the so-called "Chinese Wall" that's supposed to separate research and investment banking. "The impression I have is that, in their eagerness to increase market share, Blodget and, to a larger extent, Grubman threw the rule book out," says one longtime Wall Street lawyer.

Perhaps the more biting criticism comes from those who argue that Spitzer has actually been too easy on companies like Merrill, which he never forced to compensate investors. (There have been reports that the global settlement being negotiated will require a modest restitution fund for investors.) And, while Spitzer's $100 million settlement with Merrill seems large, it is mostly symbolic, little more than a pinprick for a company that earned $2.4 billion in profits last year and will have no trouble withstanding even the $4 billion some estimate it will have to shell out in arbitration claims and class-action suits over the next couple of years. "I think $100 million is chump change for Merrill Lynch, and it's almost a sign that the attorney general of the state of New York is settling this much too easily," Boston University economist Allen J. Michel told *The Boston Globe* in May.

But, however morally satisfying it might be to punish corporate evildoers, there's little evidence that this is what the public wants—particularly as a greater and greater percentage of that public owns stocks. In recent years, a number of commentators, mostly on the right, have written extensively about the political implications of this phenomenon. The basic assumption is that investors have a shared political philosophy that leads them to favor limited government and deference to business. Since more and more people are becoming investors, the argument goes, reflecting that philosophy is becoming increasingly important for successful politicians.

In some sense, the results of this month's elections confirm that theory. In races where the Democrats' approach to the corporate scandals was seen as retributive, the investing public—which is increasingly the public itself—largely favored their opponents. In one Indiana swing district, for example, congressional candidate Jill Long Thompson flatly accused her opponent, the chairman of a local farm-equipment manufacturer, of epitomizing "corporate greed" in a widely publicized campaign mailing. She lost by four percentage points. Democrat Ronnie Shows fared no better in the Mississippi district that WorldCom calls home. Shows spent much of his campaign emphasizing WorldCom's shenanigans and scolding his opponent for refusing to return the outsized campaign contributions he'd received from the company. Voters would have none of it, going so far as to boo Shows when he suggested in a public debate that the election was about "jobs, greed, and trade." Shows lost by 29 points.

But Spitzer's victory suggests that investors do have some interests—their interests as consumers—which only government can protect. And, while it's true that the range of projects that can be justified under the banner of consumer protection is less ambitious than the range that can be justified in the service of grander objectives, such as economic justice, many of those more ambitious projects may not be politically feasible.

When I asked Spitzer whether he regretted not pressing Merrill Lynch for large, punitive-damage awards, he was basically unapologetic. "This is not a Robin Hood effort," he told me. Democrats who don't want the growth of the investor class to mean the end of government activism would be wise to learn that lesson. ■

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Longing and Belonging

BECAUSE **Far From Heaven** (Focus) is modeled on the 1950s style of Douglas Sirk, a few words about Sirk are in order. He is best remembered for melodramas, such as *Written on the Wind* and *All That Heaven Allows*, that were richly upholstered versions of then-current romantic fiction. Through the years, those films have won high critical regard because of Sirk's stylistic triumph over banal material. For instance, a British biographical dictionary called *Makers of Modern Culture*, edited by Justin Wintle, saw fit to include Sirk (right after Georg Simmel!). Says the book: Sirk believed that "melodrama was the ideal genre at that particular historical conjuncture to express his views on American society.... He was arguably the greatest stylist in Hollywood in the 1950s."

Those views of America were tempered by unusual experience. German-born in 1900, Sirk (originally Detlev Sierk) had a notable early career in high-level German theater as a dramaturg and a director and entered films at the production company Ufa in 1933. There he apparently put his classical experience behind him and plunged into melodrama, luxuriantly clothed. The Sirk film that I've seen most recently came from that period: his adaptation of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*, done for Ufa in 1935, which was much less Ibsen than a foretaste of the Hollywood Sirk to come.

He left Germany in 1937 to protect his Jewish wife and, after a difficult hegira, established himself in Hollywood. In time he began to direct the pictures that made him successful with the public and, in further time, with many critics. Whatever one's opinion of those pictures as whole entities, they were clearly done by a director of experience and skill who tinctured his melodramas with subtle irony. After World War II, Sirk went back to Germany and worked again in the theater, but it was the Hollywood episode in his life that brought him into Wintle's dictionary.

And it is the quality of this Hollywood episode that Todd Haynes—quite openly—tries to replicate in *Far From Heaven*. His screenplay has some similarity to *All That Heaven Allows*: a middle-class woman in her thirties is attracted to her young gardener. But in Haynes's script, set in Hartford, Connecticut in 1957, the gardener is African American. More updating (as we might call it): the woman's husband discovers that he is bisexual.

Still, this updating conforms to the 1950s. The gardener's character is dolled up. When the woman accidentally meets him at an art exhibit, he discourses on modern painting in a way that "justifies" her attraction to him. When she discovers her husband's passion for men, she and he visit an analyst who plans to treat the homosexuality as an illness that can be cured. Further to set the film in period, there are such predictable touches as the décor of the woman's home and her clothes and coiffure, along with period automobiles and the glucose score by Elmer Bernstein. All these elements are locked into place by the dialogue, which is old-time soap opera. The domestic conversations of the married couple, the remarks of their two children, are so stereotypical, so *typewritten*, that we feel that the adult actors are playing parody straight. Even when the wife discovers her husband in a rendezvous with a man, her reactions are neat, powdered, patted with deodorant. I assume that there are varied reactions when people discover a spouse's bisexuality, but surely this woman's tidy behavior is not one of them.

Those two leading actors are Dennis Quaid and Julianne Moore. Quaid at least gets the chance to wrestle close to some emotional heat. Moore, exceptionally gifted, uses her gifts here to stay within the behavioral bounds of a *Good Housekeeping* mannequin. Well, even this stricture requires talent of a sort.

Haynes has made previous films that were out of the ordinary, especially *Safe*, in which Moore played a woman haunted by fears of toxins in the environment. Attempting here to be another Sirk, Haynes succeeds chiefly in some camera moves, like the traveling crane shots that give the film a sense of treacly flow. He even uses a crane shot at the close, moving from Moore in her car up a wall to the branch of a tree with blossoms like the ones that the gardener once gave her. But what Haynes lacks is the sense, as in Sirk, that the lurid melodrama is coated with embittered sweetness.

At the last we are left wondering why, in any case, an imitation Sirk was needed, what appetite or interest it might fill. Even with its latter-day (modified) frankness, *Far From Heaven* is only thin glamour that lacks a tacit wry base. Thus diminished, it can be tagged with a term that Susan Sontag once defined so well that she put it out of circulation: camp.

I had never heard Eminem before I saw **8 Mile** (Universal), and I still don't know why he is a better rapper than others I have heard. But his performance in this film (with a screenplay that is said to be somewhat autobiographical) is tight, focused. He moves through the story like someone with a half-realized obsession, hoping to be fully obsessed.

8 Mile is a road in Detroit that divides a black district from the white suburbs. Rabbit, as he is called by his mother, resides in the white suburbs, a poorer part of them, but he often crosses that road—he is one of the few white people in the film. He lives with his mother and little sister and his mother's lover. He works in a die-stamping plant and is known to his friends, most of whom are black, as a good rapper. Those friends try to push his career forward, but, in a reversal of racial block, his whiteness makes trouble.

He has girlfriends and quarrels and various adventures, including an attempt at a rapping performance in a club where the black audience won't accept him. But the real meat of *8 Mile* is not its story but its milieu. Though Curtis Hanson directed the film with an energy that makes it pulse forward, what keeps us fixed is its portrait of the society in which Rabbit lives, the swirls and currents and pools and torrents of young black lives. These people converse and fight and help and admonish one another, in a language that is sometimes hard to understand but is always warm, whether warmth of anger or of friendship. Through their customs and friendships and talk, we get the sense of visiting another country locked within our own. Of course some degree of that response is common when any Amer-

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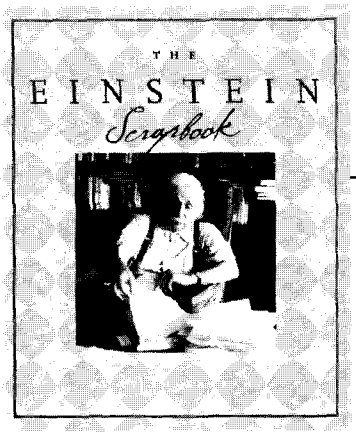

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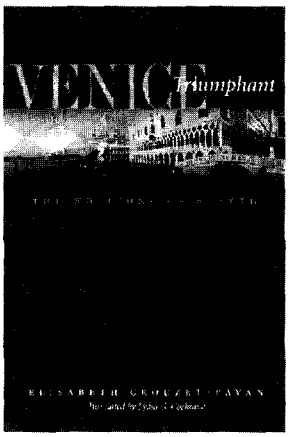

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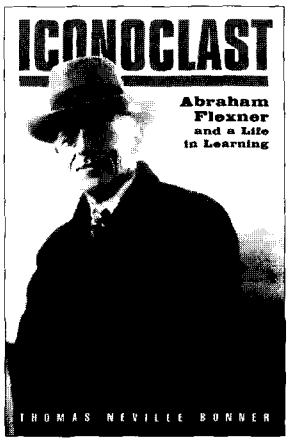

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ican film visits an ethnic group in America, and perhaps we ought not to be surprised at it here. But Hanson's rendition is so engulfing that, for this middle-class white man at any rate, the moment after the film finished was like a return to familiar country.

The film ends with a face-to-face rapping contest between Rabbit and a champion black rapper. It reminded me of the contest between two pop-music stars in Sam Shepard's play *The Tooth of Crime*. In this case, however, there is no question who will win. ■

Jennifer Homans on Dance

Movin' In

ONCE UPON A TIME, great choreographers worked on Broadway: Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Jack Cole, George Balanchine. But that was during the interwar years, when the distinction between "high" and "low" styles of dance was less important than "entertainment," pure and simple. Then, in 1943, Agnes de Mille broke the "That's Entertainment" mold by weaving modern art dance and classical ballet into her choreography for *Oklahoma!*. Jerome Robbins followed her lead, and in the course of the next twenty years revolutionized dance on Broadway.

Robbins spent his youth in the high-minded, left-leaning art dance circles of the 1940s, and was influenced by actors (Brando), musicians (Bernstein), and choreographers (de Mille) bent on forging indigenous American musical and dramatic forms. When he created *West Side Story* in 1957, it was a groundbreaking event: a serious musical about gang warfare that infused the stylish fun of Broadway with the formal complexity and the technical sophistication of classical music and dance. The dances were iconoclastic: not ballet, modern, jazz, or tap, but an organic kind of movement that seemed to burst from the frustrations and desires of its characters. To the high canonical Latin of classical ballet and modern art dance, Robbins created an energetic and muscular vernacular. It brought down the house.

Then came the 1960s, when "rock opera" and the explicit sexual burlesque of Bob Fosse swept aside the aesthetic of *West Side Story*. Robbins grew disillusioned. "What we have now," he complained in 1969, "is show biz, not art." He retreated, but never gave up his belief that dance could cut to the quick of a dramatic situation and captivate a public unschooled in classical forms. Robbins influenced several generations of Broadway choreographers, but none fully embraced his project to capture the life of a people in dance, to bridge the gap between stage and street, high and low. Robbins, it seemed, had no heir.

Until now. All signs would seem to point to a revival of dance—real, tough, dramatic dance—on Broadway. Susan Stroman, a choreographer and a director who describes herself as a "writer of dance," boasts a series of hit shows, many of which have won major awards for best choreography: among them, *The Producers*, *Oklahoma!*, and most importantly *Contact*, an original "dance play" in which three stories are told through dance, spliced with narrative, dialogue, and music ranging from Tchaikovsky to the Beach Boys. And now Twyla Tharp, one of the most important and original choreographers of our time, has conceived, choreographed, and directed *Movin' Out*, a "dance musical" about six friends whose Long Island youth is wrecked on the shoals of war in Vietnam. No spoken words, no characters breaking into song: just a serious story told in a suite of dances set to well-known songs by Billy Joel.

Like Robbins, Tharp and Stroman approach dance as theater. Both conduct voluminous research on period history and dance styles. Tharp's dancers handled an M-16, studied night drill, and pored over documentary material about Vietnam. Stroman insists that her dancers have "backstories," and detailed biographies gird even the most minor roles. Like Robbins, both move easily between Broadway and the sanctums of high art: Tharp is famous for her ability to "cross over" between modern dance (where she began) and ballet, and has choreographed work for American Ballet Theater, the Royal Ballet, New York City Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet, as well as for Broadway, Hollywood, and her own modern dance troupe; she has used music ranging from Beethoven to Springsteen. Stroman, who is younger, has already created pieces for New York City Ballet, New York City Opera, and The Martha Graham Company, in addition to her work on Broadway.

BUT STROMAN AND THARP are not the same. Indeed, they are polar opposites. Stroman is a vaudevillian at heart, a woman of sharp directorial instincts with a flair for fast pacing and rousing production numbers. But she is a second-rate choreographer who cuts and pastes dance styles—tap, jazz, ballet—as if they were so many indiscriminate steps rather than distinct traditions, each with its own values and cultural resonance. Her thin, scratch-the-surface dances support only the most superficial kinds of drama, and she unwittingly reduces dance to a series of clichés. She may be pulling audiences in, but she is dragging dance down.

For a choreographer of her acclaim, Stroman has strikingly little dance training. She studied dance as a child, performed in community theater, and came to New York after graduating from the University of Delaware in 1976. She cut her teeth in the 1980s doing Broadway tours (*Chicago*, *Sugar Babies*), industrial shows, cabaret acts, and commercials. She is a product of Broadway at a time when few musicals included serious dancing: there was not much to learn from. Not surprisingly, her own choreographic vocabulary is shallow, and her dances are self-consciously energetic and clever.

Take *Oklahoma!*. In the original production, de Mille juxtaposed dance styles to express emotional quandaries: ballet was love, sultry cabaret jazz represented vice, and dark Grahamesque figures swooping across the stage told of Laurey's psychological anguish. Stroman has re-choreographed and "modernized" de Mille's legendary choreography. "This *Oklahoma!* has a grittier feel," she says. "It's not geraniums in window boxes and polka-dot skirts. There's dirt on the stage." But in the famous Dream Ballet sequence, to take the most glaring example, all she has really done is water down de Mille's ideas and add a bit of sex. The ballet sections consist of repetitive waltz steps, the barroom characters show more in their

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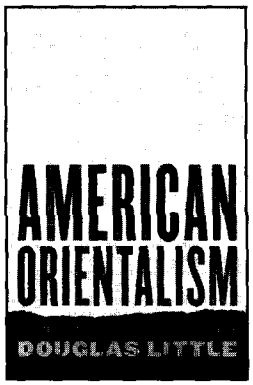

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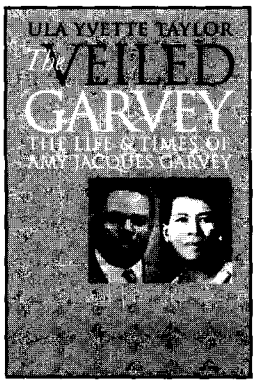

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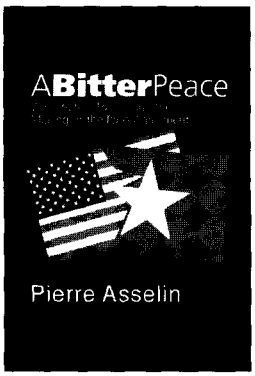

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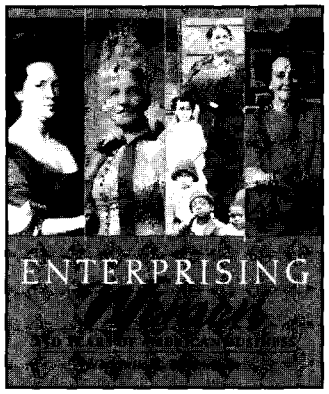

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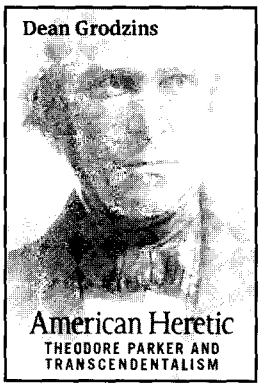

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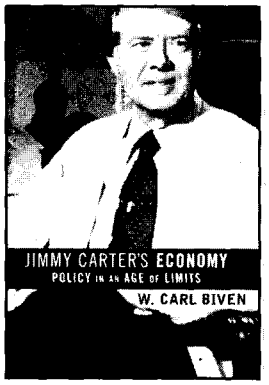

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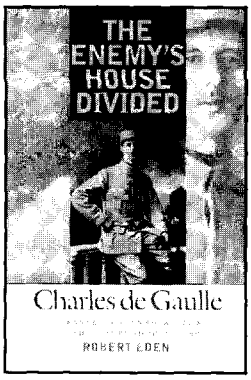

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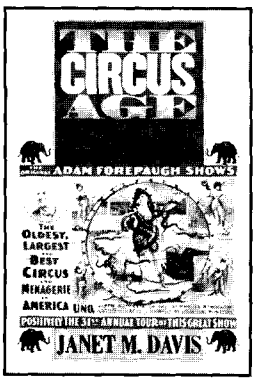

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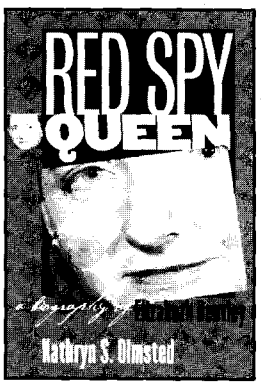

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costumes than in their movements, and Laurey's nightmarish torment is reduced to inarticulate orgasmic writhing.

Stroman's impoverished sense of style is even more pronounced in *Contact*. The popular "girl in a yellow dress" episode tells of a suicidal advertising executive who finds solace in a club alive with couples swing dancing to a medley of rock 'n' roll hits. Fine, except that the dancers all look alike and do the same monotonous moves over and over and over again: a sleek and sexy generic "swing" fitted to all kinds of music. This is not choreography; it is simply a social dance set on stage. Why then, has the "yellow dress" dance been so enthusiastically received? The answer, I think, is simple: Stroman uses great rock 'n' roll music and wonderful dancers. Audiences have come to expect so little from dance that they are content to see beautifully trained bodies boogying to music that they love.

Stroman's defenders insist that the swing-dance section works because each dancer also acts: character colors the dance steps. And indeed, when she auditioned dancers for *Contact*, Stroman asked them to execute steps in various moods, "aggressive, flirtatious, as if you were a child, as if you were eighty." This is all very well, but even the most talented dancer cannot act without a script—without steps. Grimaces and seductive sideward glances are not enough.

Stroman often makes up for her lack of choreographic vocabulary with props and gimmicks. The entire first act of *Contact* takes place on a swing—Fragonard's. The famous eighteenth-century painting is acted out and "updated": aristocratic gentleman trades places with macho servant and observes polite eighteenth-century courtship as foreplay for black-leather sex on swing with knowing damsel. Aside from a few ballet steps (the aristocrat's, naturally), the entire dance consists of gymnastic sex on a swing. If anything matters in all this, it is the swing, not the dance. This is not an isolated example: Stroman's choreography is full of revolving floors, spinning beds (more sex), ropes, ladders, hats, and the like. These effects do not add to the dance; they *are* the dance.

What Stroman is good at is music-hall-style fun-loving numbers strung together with consummate professionalism. She is a spirited director, which is why her best show is *The Producers*: no dance and lots of gimmicks, including a wobbling chorus line of old ladies on walkers. She keeps the show going, and whatever you think of the content, it has a vaudevillian's sense of timing and hyperbole. This is a real talent, but it has little to do with "writing dance."

TWYLA THARP IS another matter altogether, and it is no surprise that *Movin' Out* is packed with superb, high-octane dancing. It is in a different league from any other dance musical on Broadway today. John Selya and Elizabeth Parkinson in particular perform with wit, abandon, and sensational technical prowess. Indeed, it is tempting to say that *Movin' Out* is a tight-fisted, physically forceful, and entertaining dance revue to Billy Joel's likable if sentimental pop tunes (performed by a live band on a raised platform above the stage). But this would miss the point of a show that also takes us to the killing fields of Vietnam, complete with death, drugs, dissipation, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

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John Selya in *Movin' Out*

Indeed, *Movin' Out* is fiercely ambitious. It is not just a Broadway show: "it's a full-length ballet," Tharp confides, "but you can't call it that." Because the dancers do not stop to sing, the entire drama rides on the dances and the lyrics of Billy Joel's songs. Tharp chose Joel's songs because they seemed to her to tell the story of American innocence, and how it was lost in Vietnam. She examined images of the war. She read the *Iliad*. And in rehearsals Tharp parked the ghost of Jerome Robbins in the corner as a kind of artistic superego. She is clearly aiming for a twenty-first-century *West Side Story*, an American *Sleeping Beauty* that will bring dance—not just Broadway bump and grind, but technically complex theatrical dance—to a popular audience. She wants dance to tell the story of her generation, and she wants it to be a mega-hit. And why not? It is a bold and welcome ambition. To understand why the show disappoints—because it does—it helps to know some things about Tharp.

Born in 1941 to a Quaker family in Indiana, Tharp moved to California at age eight, where her parents opened a drive-in movie theater near San Bernardino. She worked the popcorn stand and, over the course of the next ten years, watched hundreds of 1950s Hollywood romances. Her mother assiduously prepared her for a career in theater: she studied ballet, toe, flamenco, tap, rope-twirling, Hawaiian dance, drums, baton, elocution, painting, viola, violin, acrobatics. And that was just the beginning. When Tharp arrived in New York City in 1961 (to study art history at Barnard College), dance was in the full tilt of modernism: she worked with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Eugene "Luigi" Lewis (jazz), and the Russian dancers Igor Schwezoff and Olga Pereyaslavec (ballet), among many others. She saw the work of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins.

In the course of her early life, then, Tharp was exposed to a broad cultural spectrum, from California kitsch to American modern dance and Russian classical ballet. She did not just see these things,

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she tried them on, put them in her body. And then, like so many others of her generation, she rebelled. She had been working with Paul Taylor, but left in protest: he was becoming too commercial. She lived with (and eventually married) the painter Bob Huot, and spent long evenings engaged in hothouse discussions with artists pondering the merits and perils of Abstract Expressionism. And in 1966 she began producing her own work at the Judson Church in Greenwich Village.

The Judson Church artists were interested in freeing themselves from the past: from the choreographic, technical, and theatrical conventions of modern dance and classical ballet. They wanted to start over, and build a new kind of dance that went back to first principles—back to everyday movement (walking, running), non-proscenium space, and chance encounters rather than plotted dances. They did not dance in ballet shoes or bare feet: they wore Keds. As Yvonne Rainer famously declared in 1965, "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the antiheroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved."

ALTHOUGH THARP SOON rejected most of this, she took the fundamental premise to heart: she started over, and made her own dance idiom. Working with a small group of like-minded dancers, she deconstructed movement. Using improvisation and painstaking analysis, she and her dancers reversed, inverted, "retrograded," and generated thousands of permutations of simple movements. In the course of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Tharp evolved a way of moving based on parts rather than wholes: the body was literally unhinged, and arms, legs, head, ribs, hands were all freed to work in any combination. The audience was made to see the parts being re-ordered, pushed apart, re-jigged. It was complicated because any single movement followed a course through the body: several movements working at the same time (each with its own speed, energy, and weight) might collide, mingle, and rebound.

The result was a de-centered, relaxed, and fragmented kind of dancing that seemed full of choice and possibility: the dancers sorted through a myriad of physical impulses on the spot, in front of our eyes. As such, Tharp's style did not look

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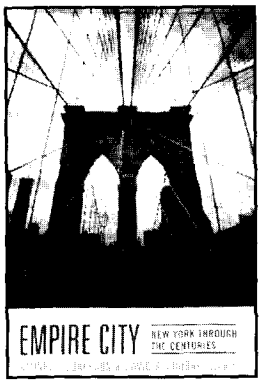

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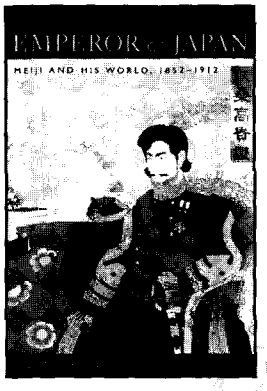

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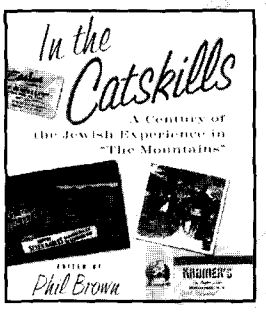

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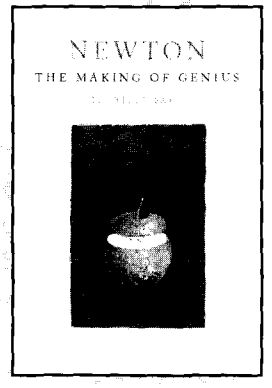

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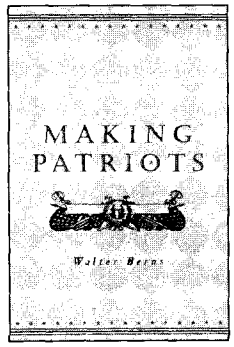

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"choreographed" but seemed to grow from the personalities of her dancers, who wore the movement like a second skin. Nothing seemed difficult, artificial (like ballet), or composed. This was partly illusion: choices were made and adhered to, and the work could be taught and repeated. It was "set" spontaneity. But by isolating strands of movement in the body, and by crafting dances out of simple ordinary movements, Tharp built flexibility, casualness, and freedom into her movement: each step alluded to another "step not taken." Her choreography looked colloquial, open-ended, and individualistic, when in fact it was also minutely calibrated and structurally solid.

But Tharp's style was anything but dry or intellectual. Her loose-limbed movements were also permeated with fleeting gestures, postures, and images garnered from pop culture and fashions, such as a slumped back or a jutting Elvis-style pelvis. Often her references were oblique or abstracted: a shift in weight and timing might remind us of Elvis without exactly imitating his moves. Tharp managed to pull the physical intricacies of her technique into a sensual, playful, and shoulder-shrugging idiom. Even at its most stylized and balletic (*Nine Sinatra Songs*), grim and ugly (*Bad Smells*), or physically exalted (*In the Upper Room*), Tharp's dances were crosscut with images from ordinary life.

In the early years, Tharp's aesthetic was partly informed by a brand of youth-movement politics. She purposely worked only with women, and the dancers never supported or lifted each other; she never bowed, and was indifferent to commercial success; she did not choreograph to music, but performed her dances in pure silence; she insisted that dance was relevant to the lives of ordinary people, and her company danced in parks, mingled their movements with those of students between classes on university campuses, and mixed with museumgoers as they went about the business of seeing art. After 1971, with her popularity mounting, Tharp shifted course: men joined her company, and she began experimenting with partnering; she used music, took bows, fundraised, and devoted herself to the business of sustaining her own art.

But the past was not moot: many of the women who have danced with Tharp (Sara Rudner and Shelley Washington are only the most obvious examples) have had singularly self-assured and independent stage personalities, and Tharp's work has often been characterized by a "let it all hang loose" sexuality and by ideas of egalitarianism, independence, and community. To this day, she will draw audiences into informal post-performance discussions of her work, and her openness to the public remains a cornerstone of her art. As she recently explained, "People will come to me and say, 'I don't understand anything about dance, but....' And I say, 'Stop right there. You know everything you need to know because you move.'"

BUT THESE ARE not the things that Tharp is generally known for. She made it big in 1973 when she "crossed over" into ballet and made *Deuce Coupe*, to music by the Beach Boys, on the Joffrey Ballet. In 1976 she choreographed *Push Comes to Shove* for Baryshnikov and American Ballet Theater. Her enormous success, then and since, has generally been attributed to her ability to synthesize: ballet, jazz, ballroom, bebop, the monkey, tap—you name it—mixed and matched in witty and elegant ways. But this, I think, misses an essential point.

Tharp's greatest contribution has been to forge her own distinctive system of vernacular movement. She has often juxtaposed her style with other established dance forms—most notably, classical ballet. *Deuce Coupe*, for example, features a ballerina repeating academic movements while Tharp's dancers go wild and woozy around her. But beneath the fun and games lies a strong-minded assertion. The ballerina is the classical still-point; Tharp's style is an alternative—free, funky, yet an equally viable way of organizing movement. Similarly, when she literally "shoved" Baryshnikov off balance in *Push Comes to Shove*, she was not just letting the devil loose on ballet. She set her relaxed, mischievous style against his sincere and centered classicism: the result was not a synthesis, but a collision, not between him and her, but *in* his body—and often in midair.

These dances worked because they underscored the differences in kind between Tharp's idiom and classical ballet. Even in its most radical and Neoclassical forms, ballet is an aristocratic art predicated on the possibility of certainty, truth, and beauty. An arabesque is not a loose structure, and it has nothing to do with ordinary movement: it is a precise and rational ordering of the body, in keeping with elevated manners and discreet taste. Moreover, classical training instills a lifted center of gravity and a honed racehorse muscularity. Nothing could be more opposed to Tharp's liberated, weight-throwing style, her shifting center of gravity and sensual, carefree manners.

And yet, in the past fifteen years, Tharp has worked increasingly with highly

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trained ballet dancers in the classical idiom. By accepting the premises of classicism rather than coming at them from the oblique, however, she has often muted her own voice, with mixed results. Which is why hopes were so high for *Movin' Out*. Perhaps here, on Broadway, she would expand and deepen her own vernacular. But although the dances in *Movin' Out* are recognizably Tharp, they are also finished, polished, and distinctly balletic. Her principal dancers are all classically trained and hail from major ballet companies. With them, she has tightened and streamlined her style, brought the forces of the body into unison, and instilled a clear order where multiple impulses once reigned.

This smoothing of the surface makes the dance less accessible and restricts its dramatic reach. Elizabeth Parkinson dances up a storm, and her sleek, liquid-gold moves are amazing to watch, but they offer little room for depth of character. Similarly, John Selya knows how to send his weight down as he flies up into angry double tours or spins into multiple, low-slung pirouettes. But tours and pirouettes are an up-and-down thing, no matter how many you do or how well you do them, and in *Movin' Out* there are too many—at the expense of more subtle and less bravura forms of expression.

Billy Joel's music only adds to the ersatz quality of the show. His songs have little to do with the restless and troubled 1960s. Joel recorded his first big hit in 1973, the year that America began to pull out of Vietnam, and his easy piano-bar rhythms speak instead to the suburban youth of Generation X. In 1982 he turned his sights briefly to the war, with a single melodramatic song, "Goodnight Saigon." But it is a predictably rose-colored "take" on a raw and difficult issue: "and we will all go down together...." Joel is a classically trained pianist, but he uses his skills to sweeten his music, not to add texture or depth. He is also known for his takeoffs on vintage rock 'n' roll styles (the best song in the show, "Uptown Girl," recalls the Four Seasons), but he is a far cry from the real thing. The live band in the show performs superbly, but the music is unrelentingly sentimental and derivative.

One is tempted to conclude that Tharp chose Joel for the same reason that she has smoothed her own vernacular with the more timeless certainties of classical ballet: she wants to universalize the Vietnam war, to spin it as a heroic and noble American epic. But Vietnam is hard to sell as a tidy, cathartic morality tale of troubled times overcome. Joel's sugarcoated songs and Tharp's seductive dances cannot support this kind of historical freight. We are hard-pushed to believe when—in the space of a single song ("We Didn't Start the Fire")—the innocent hometown guys go to war, kill and get killed, and turn into raging young men, while their teeny-bopping girlfriends back home dope up, become hippies, and sink into teary anguish at the news of a fiancé's grim death. It is heavy going and clichéd. In another dance, a disturbed and shaking GI is healed with sex, love, and a song. At the end of the show every guy gets a gal, and they all return to their champagne-popping lives.

Movin' Out is too shallow to be serious and too serious to be fun. It is not a great American musical, nor does it live up to the high drama of a full-length ballet. In the great nineteenth-century ballets, the story is told with mime, and the dancers elaborate formal and emotional situations in pure dance variations, much as opera weaves recitative and aria. So, too, in the Broadway musical, which grew out of nineteenth-century comic opera: characters speak the plot and develop the rest in song and dance. But Tharp opts for an entirely different structure. Her dances are strictly tied to Joel's lyrics, which narrate the story. Some have argued that this

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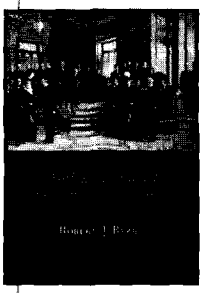

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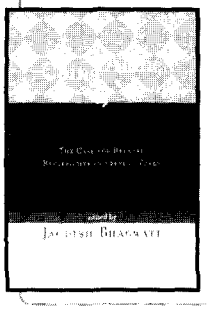

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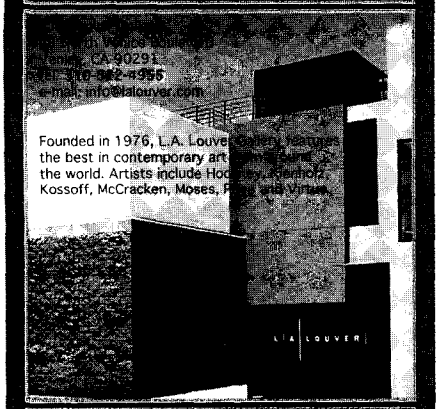

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doesn't work; that Tharp reduces dance to illustration and mime, with few openings for pure dance "arias." Thus, John Selya's angry punching movements merely "act out" Joel's lyrics to "Angry Young Man." Dance, the argument goes, is an inherently abstract art form, ill-suited to narrative genres.

And yet Tharp herself has shown us in the past that illustrating lyrics with her kind of dance can work. In *Short Stories* (1980), for example, she set gesture and movement up against the songs of Supertramp and Bruce Springsteen, to impressive dramatic effect. True, *Short Stories* was a series of vignettes, not a sustained drama. But *Movin' Out* does not fail because it ties dance too closely to words. It fails because Tharp presses violent and complicated issues into sweet and simple forms. Whether it is possible to build a truly great full-length narrative ballet up from popular lyrics must remain, I think, an open question.

What is clear is that Tharp has raised the stakes. She is a choreographer with far-reaching and original ambitions, and she has her own dance language, even when she chooses to truncate its expressive range. But there is also something self-undermining about her artistic judgment. To pair Vietnam with Billy Joel, and to push her own extraordinary style in the direction of a more generic balletic jazz: such decisions are difficult to fathom.

Still, if Tharp's show wrests the Broadway stage from choreographers like Susan Stroman and reminds audiences (and producers) just how exhilarating truly expert dance can be, we could yet see a renewal of dance on Broadway. There are other choreographers at work today who know a lot about the gray area between everyday movement and formal techniques. Not surprisingly, two of the most promising are former Tharp dancers John Carrafa and Jamie Bishton. Carrafa has had some success on Broadway already, with his warm and witty spoof of American dance classics in *Urinetown* and his understated but effective work with actors in *Into the Woods*. Bishton does not work on Broadway, but at a recent concert in New York he presented a dance about the troubled relationship between Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, in which a dramatic predicament spread gently into movement and became a full-grown dance.

If dance is to reach wide audiences, it must be fun, witty, energetic, and utterly serious. It must get under the skin of our beliefs and enter into our lives. Twyla Tharp knows how to make this kind of dance. Indeed, if anyone is equipped to create a full-length American dance epic, she is. But *Movin' Out* is not it. When I asked the woman sitting next to me how she liked the show, she responded: "If you are a Billy Joel fan and like some good dancing, then I guess it's great." She had never heard of Twyla Tharp. ■

Jed Perl on Art

Bookings

THERE ARE A great many ways that a writer can approach an artist and each of them is inadequate for one reason or another. An author who aims for a finely detailed view of the artist's life may leave us with only a shadowy sense of the work itself, while the writer who lavishes razor-sharp analytical skills on a particular painting or sculpture can sometimes lose track of that smidgen of matter-of-factness that ties even the loftiest achievement to day-to-day experience. Evaluating visual or documentary evidence is always a complex business. How does an author weigh the firsthand testimony of an artist? What can be extrapolated from the work itself? To what extent should the cultural situation out of which an artist emerges be taken into account, and should this situation be presented as background or as an animating factor in some more immediate sense? And what of the countless man-made objects whose creators remain entirely anonymous or about whom we have only the most fragmentary information? How does a writer discuss the creation of a work of art when the individual who made it remains unknown?

Every art book that is published offers some sort of response to these questions. Two memoirs by artists appearing this season—one by Saul Steinberg, the supremely elegant wit who died in 1999; the other by Balthus, our last link to the

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School of Paris, who died in 2001—are works of selective disclosure that, in spite of their considerable value, can serve to remind us that even the artist who speaks out offers only a partial picture of what is involved in the making of a work of art. At the extreme opposite from these two books, which are expressions of what might be called the artist's romance with himself, is a group of books about movers and shakers in twentieth-century style—among them the furniture and interior designers Koloman Moser and Dagobert Peche, the graphic designer Alexey Brodovitch, and the photographer Thérèse Bonney—who probably succeeded to the extent that their taste became the very look of the world in which they lived. Surely a painter and a furniture designer demand different responses, and thus different kinds of books. But even the work of the same painter can be approached in many different ways.

SAUL STEINBERG'S **Reflections and Shadows** (Random House, $24.95) is not so much a book of recollections as it is a group of striking word pictures, a fireworks display of verbal flourishes to be appended to the artist's oeuvre. In this little volume, Steinberg's childhood in Romania, his student years in Italy, and his love of the American Midwest provide occasions for the deviously elegant aggrandizements of the quotidian that we know from his *New Yorker* drawings. Every last word of *Reflections and Shadows* may be true, but there is little doubt that we are in the presence of a carefully manicured truth when Steinberg's father turns out to be a sort of proto-Steinbergian artist who ran "a small factory for cardboard boxes, with lots of colored paper and a great supply of glue. The factory had the smell of an artist's studio, of collages, as well as the smell of the ink used on large wooden letters to print the ribbons of funeral wreaths."

Steinberg's gift for layered visual stylizations—for an effect that is at once campy and classic—finds verbal analogues. A group of Central Italian women strike him as having "stepped right out of the Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna," and also, on reflection, as having the round eyes that he later saw "in the comic strips: Mickey Mouse, Orphan Annie." Steinberg gives us only the outlines of an experience, but what outlines they are. Describing his wary friendship with a carpenter who worked for him in his house on Long Island, he observes that their conversation was best when they told each other "the things that every so often emerged spontaneously from whatever we were doing: things spoken without looking at each other, both of us in profile, turned in opposite directions." Although every image in *Reflections and Shadows* has a shimmering rightness, a reader may wish that Steinberg did not seem quite so delighted with his own ingenuity. That's the rub. In these memoirs, as in so many of Steinberg's drawings, the spic-and-span, slightly fussbudgety niftiness of the effects may be the artist's sly way of fessing up to his essentially minor-league status. Reading Steinberg is like watching exquisite soap bubbles emerge, grow fat, and then burst.

WHILE STEINBERG'S reflections are presented as sharp, rapid-fire little images, Balthus's memoir, **Vanished Splendors** (Ecco, $29.95), suggests vast panoramas seen through sheets of gauze, in eye-straining soft-focus. Almost everything is wrong with this book. The interviews, conducted by Alain Vircondelet, contain an absurd amount of repetition; the few pages of illustrations are mostly squandered on lifestyle-magazine shots of Balthus's home and family; and Balthus, speaking in his most mannered seigneurial style, tells the same old stories about the encouragement that he received as a child from Rilke, and generally tosses off any oracular hokum that comes to mind, as when it occurs to him that Pope John Paul II and his old friend Antonin Artaud share the same "mystical fierceness." And yet I will happily confess that I read every word of this misfit of a book and plan to put it right up on the shelf with the other Balthus books, because this artist, despite the grandiloquent nonsense, cannot help but occasionally come through with the flash of insight that you expect from a supreme artistic intelligence.

When Balthus discusses his differences with the Surrealists and says that "painting cannot be toyed with," you suddenly feel the man's weight. And secreted somewhere deep in *Vanished Splendors* is the beginning of an explanation of what it means not to toy with painting. The artist who liked to slip behind the fancy dress persona of the Count de Rola, as Balthus was fond of being called, is a truly modern figure, absolutely of his time in his belief that the meaning of a painting is revealed through the painting process itself. When Balthus announces that "the artist must not become a storyteller," he is insisting that where painting begins, literature ends; he is giving notice to the many admirers of all things Balthusian who have mistakenly associated his art with a re-introduction of narrative into painting. "The anecdote should not exist in paint-

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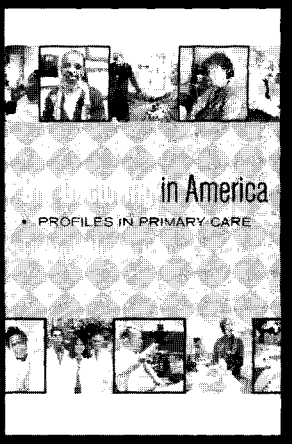

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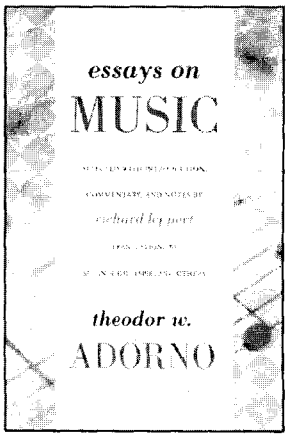

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ing," he explains, and thereby rejects the academic idea of a painting as fulfilling some programmatic goal. "A picture or subject imposes itself, and it alone knows how profound and vertiginous it is. Nothing happens in a picture, it simply is; it exists by essence or does not exist at all."

The word "vertiginous" is worth lingering over, for Balthus uses the sense of a dangerous balancing act to take us to what is perhaps the core of his aesthetic. He believes that the work of a painter involves "analogies," "border paths," and "trails," and is "a question of crossing, of passing through." He reminds us that one of his most famous paintings is called *Le Passage du Commerce Saint-André*. Balthus is convinced that the process of working on the painting, which involves intensifying pictorial effects, necessitates a passage or crossing from one state to another. "Technique can help to advance along the pathway," he observes. And one's engagement with the painting is by its very nature fluid, because the way is unclear, because if the painting has that vertiginous life, the artist (and perhaps the viewer, too) is always moving from one reality to another, from the ordinary to the extraordinary. This artist, so often spoken of as the last great realist, in fact believed that the reality of painting was what you found as you were working, in the sense that Piero della Francesca's "way of filling space in his paintings, of dividing it by placing diagonals that give order to the whole thing... constantly advances order."

Balthus's belief that painting is a matter of analogies, of passages, of a constantly advancing order, was surely not his alone. This view is related to a cluster of beliefs that fueled French art for much of the twentieth century, and they are given a luxuriantly expansive presentation in Pierre Schneider's great book **Matisse** (Rizzoli, $100). Originally published in 1984, Schneider's huge study has at last been brought back into print in an edition that duplicates the generous original format, with its panoply of fine color reproductions. For Matisse, the passage or crossing involved an abstraction of naturalistic experience or a re-naturalization of abstract ideas, a process that was analogic and metaphoric, so that the woman before Matisse's eyes could become a mythic figure and then a near-abstract iconic form. The reproductions that Schneider has selected show this process unfolding, and his text, which is grounded in a close study of Matisse's written observations, magnifies the quicksilver movements of the artist's imagination through the fluidity of literary association.

Reaching to describe Matisse's reinvigoration of myth, which had been "reduced to a mere story"—that anecdote that Balthus rejects—Schneider shows how Matisse "replace[d] the context of vanished meaning with another context, formulated by the artist himself." This re-formulation of myth involves "transgress[ing] the traditional limits of his craft." Brief quotation cannot convey the subtlety of Schneider's writing, the way his streaming references—which include, in a few paragraphs about myth, allusions to Proust, Hegel, Signac, Baudelaire, and Colette—somehow match the rapid-fire movement of Matisse's mind. The close integration of image and text in this book gives the very process of reading an added dimension, for Schneider's prose sometimes actually manages to create the illusion that we are seeing the artist's mind at work.

When Schneider's *Matisse* first appeared, some people said that the author, who had close ties to the Matisse family, had originally hoped to write a biography, but the family still felt protective about the details of Matisse's private life. Now, fifteen years later, Hilary Spurling, with the family's cooperation, is working on the second volume of a full-scale biography; the first volume, **The Unknown Matisse** (University of California Press, $22.50), which appeared in 1998 and is now available in paperback, is an attractively straightforward and finely tuned account of the man's life up to 1908, a book that many will no doubt prefer to Schneider's analytical pyrotechnics. I do not think that Schneider's sumptuous volume has ever received the wholehearted response that it deserves. His text will overwhelm those who expect a conventional coffee-table book, and the improvisational dazzle of the exposition will not sit easily with readers who are committed to one or another theory about how a painting ought to be analyzed. Schneider's analytical forays strike some people as showoffy, but I think that his exuberant meditations keep leading us back to the paintings. Matisse's art can support Schneider's analysis. As for those who would read the vigorous common sense of Spurling's biography as a criticism of Schneider's hyperbolic speculations, I do not see that we need to choose.

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BUT THERE ARE writers who overwhelm artists, and Michael Fried risks joining their company in **Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin** (Yale University Press, $55). Fried sees this book as forming a trilogy, along with his earlier studies of Courbet and Eakins, in which he explores the processes by which nineteenth-century realism, with all its aesthetic and scientific and philosophic ramifications, gave birth to the self-consciousness of modern art. Fried, who is by many reckonings the foremost chronicler of a gathering modern sensibility in nineteenth-century art, has a crackerjack mind, but there is something fatiguing about the relentlessness with which he works a subject. Of course Adolph Menzel, who lived a very long life, from 1815 to 1905, had his own kind of relentlessness. He drew everything he saw, and through his staggeringly prolix achievement as a graphic artist he elbows his way into our understanding of the nineteenth century, even if—as I believe—his paintings are almost invariably congested and over-elaborated. There is an air of creepy fascination and gloomy foreboding about Menzel's finicky realism. Fried's book is full of drawings in which working people and bits of machinery and a chest stuffed with old papers are drawn from such odd angles and with such rapt attentiveness that you cannot help but conclude that something is up—except that I am not convinced that Menzel is up to anything very complicated.

Fried has found that these drawings,

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with their elaborate trompe l'oeil effects, are just the thing to get his mind going; they become pegs on which to hang more and more ideas. He stokes the intellectual furnaces with the almost staggering pileup of images and motifs in Menzel's work, including detailed observations of his own period as well as elaborate historical reconstructions of the eighteenth-century Germany of Frederick the Great. Fried does not pursue a line of argument so much as he stage-manages a discourse. When he sets out to explain the power of some of Menzel's drawings by turning his attention to certain passages in *Either/Or*, the pacing is so lumbering and portentous that I begin to believe that a revelation is in store. After pages devoted to Kierkegaard's thoughts on marriage, the punch line arrives: "I am proposing that for Menzel the act of drawing—not invariably but often enough for it to be the hallmark of that vital portion of his oeuvre—was essentially a practice of the everyday." Is that all? We don't need Kierkegaard for this. Fried is a learned man, and he has the rhetorical skills of a master debater, but after a while he does not seem to be talking about Menzel so much as he is talking to himself.

It is wonderful to read a writer who can produce a text that is nearly as interesting as the artist that it treats, but when the writer begins to devour the artist we have trouble. In the case of certain artists, of course, over-exposition has come to be essential to the sky-high valuation of their work, so that a straightforward approach, especially an insistence on relating the biographical facts pretty much on their own merits, can feel almost subversive. Of no modern artist is this more true than of Duchamp, whose most ardent admirers are able to deduce the entire history of Western thought from his smallest sketch or found object. They are going to be as uncomfortable with Alice Goldfarb Marquis's new biography, **Marcel Duchamp: The Bachelor Stripped Bare** (MFA Publications, $37.50), as they were with Calvin Tomkins's biography, which came out six years ago. For those who now regard Duchamp as the essential artist of the twentieth century, biography is a perilous business, because their hero has a way of sounding more like a high-bohemian gigolo than an audacious creator. Robbed of the fetishistic footnoting and cataloguing and theorizing that Duchampians adore, the great man looks like little more than a handsome period piece, and Marquis makes it quite clear that she takes some pleasure in (as she would have it) stripping him bare. Marquis, who is the author of an important biography of Alfred H. Barr Jr., does wobble somewhat at the outset of her study of Duchamp, where she seems to believe that New York's SoHo was already filling up with art galleries in the 1960s. But she presents a basically confident portrait of Duchamp and his times, and she can be very good at suggesting the way that ideas bubble up in a period, as in her discussion of the gathering fascination with Leonardo da Vinci at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Believe it or not, there are still important artists whose life stories have not been told. A great biography could surely be written about Hans Hofmann, whose blazingly easygoing paintings and unparalleled gifts as a teacher made him a fulcrum figure in American art. **Hans Hofmann** (Rizzoli, $125), a greatly expanded version of a book originally published in 1963, has been edited by James Yohe, and the big selection of colorplates brings you face-to-face with Hofmann's counterpoint of rousting romantic opulence and bracing painterly pragmatism. The black outlines in his sumptuous studio interiors of the 1930s and 1940s give a blunt, no-nonsense immediacy to the glut of color, and in his later works (he died in 1966) Hofmann evokes times of day and seasons of the year with an unparalleled

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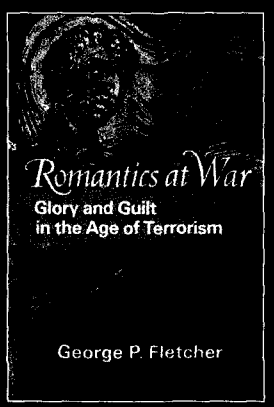

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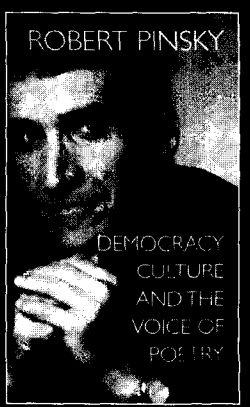

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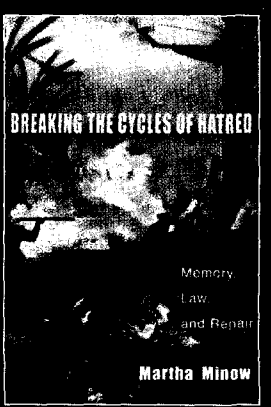

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Violence often begets violence. In this powerful and timely book Martha Minow and others ask: What explains these cycles and what can break them?

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abstract-poetic assurance. He uses washes and impastoed passages of paint and wrenching contrasting colors to condense into his abstract onslaught what feels like every thought that every romantic spirit has ever had. The book includes a good selection of Hofmann's own writings, a solid text by Sam Hunter, and an essay on Hofmann's two mosaic murals (which are among the little-known treasures of New York City), as well as interesting photographs of the man, his school, and his friends. The whole production is upbeat and handsome, down to the elegant blue cloth binding and the slipcase covered with details from Hofmann's *Combinable Wall (1961)*, with its gladdening geometry.

Of course there can be a special pleasure in a volume in which we take in not the entire range of an artist's work but some particular period or theme. **Henri Matisse, Ellsworth Kelly: Plant Drawings** (Gingko Press, $39.95), the English edition of the catalogue of a show first held at the Pompidou Center in Paris, is an uncomplicated eye-opener. The selection of Matisses includes some surprises, such as a pillowy study of a rose, done in charcoal in 1945; and Kelly's drawings, though less daringly exploratory than Matisse's, have their own kind of scrupulous nerviness. **Lois Orswell, David Smith, and Modern Art** (Yale University Press, $66), the catalogue of an exhibition currently at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, celebrates the gutsiness of Orswell, a woman whose collection, which she gave to Harvard, ranges from primitive and classical art to modern masters and postwar American painting and sculpture. One of the high points is a powerhouse accumulation of work by David Smith, with whom Orswell became friends and kept up a correspondence that is included in this book. Marjorie B. Cohn's long essay about Orswell's activities as a collector is a significant addition to our understanding of postwar American art. Cohn shows how the activities of dealers such as Curt Valentin (from whom Orswell bought her first work, a Klee) and Marian Willard (who represented Smith) encouraged independent-mindedness in younger collectors. And independent Orswell certainly was, dismissing Motherwell as a nothing-much painter and buying the work of the still grievously undervalued Earl Kerkam, whose densely worked portraits and still lifes were much admired by Pollock and Kline and Guston.

An amusing cultural footnote to the Surrealist movement in America is offered by **Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus: The Surrealist Funhouse from the 1939 World's Fair** (Princeton Architectural Press, $60). Ingrid Schaffner has built her text around a series of photographs taken by Eric Schaal, in which he documents the development and construction and operation—by Dalí, his dealer Julien Levy, and various others—of a concession in the Amusements Zone of the World's Fair that featured bare-breasted women in mermaid costumes going for a swim. *Time* magazine, after complaining that much of "the Fair's nudity is so much peeping tommyrot," praised Dalí's pavilion as clever and alluring, although elsewhere it was said to be just a "different version of a nudie tank show." The book, with its pink-and-black typography, is as fashionably florid as the highfalutin concession stand that it commemorates. But Schaal's photographs of hardworking New York dames in various states of Dalí-esque dress and undress have a snapshot immediacy that cuts through the nonsense and gives this period piece of a book an almost novelistic sting.

COURTESY VENDOME PRESS

Colantonio, detail from *Saint Vincent Ferrer Altarpiece*, mid-fifteenth century

Another European artist who left a mark (a very different mark) on American art is the subject of Virginia Gardner Troy's small, lucid study **Anni Albers and Ancient American Textiles: From Bauhaus to Black Mountain** (Ashgate, $59.95). It is no secret that Anni and Josef Albers's travels in Mexico and South America were the precipitating factors in the development in the 1940s and 1950s of Anni's pictorial weavings, those abstract compositions that have the lyric power of some of the finest painting that was being done at the time. What Troy demonstrates here is the degree to which Albers's taste for pre-Columbian art had been nurtured during her early years in Germany, where this ancient American art was already being widely collected and discussed by some of the most advanced voices in art history and aesthetics. Albers tended to eschew direct references to the magically charged imagery of pre-Columbian art, in weavings done both at the Bauhaus in the 1920s and in America later on. And when she wrote about South American textiles she always emphasized their technical intricacy, not their metaphoric powers. You might say that those metaphoric powers were the great subtext in her weavings. And in this astute historical study, Troy shows how the emotional potency of pre-Columbian art, with its fiercely yet tenderly abstracted signs and symbols, percolated through Anni Albers's work for decades, giving to even her most austere

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designs a mysterious, whisper-soft liveliness.

For the writer who is interested in the artists of the past several hundred years, the amount of available information is often so abundant that the most daunting challenges involve figuring out what to put in and what to leave out. For the student of earlier periods the situation is very often the reverse, and the trick is to know how to tease what information one can out of relatively few primary sources. With the study of Netherlandish art of the fifteenth century, a great deal of detective work is required. There is too little evidence available to make it possible ever to write a full biography of Jan van Eyck or Rogier van der Weyden, and it is the paucity or at least the spottiness of the evidence that inevitably shapes a scholar's approach and encourages so many studies of donors and commissions, of shop practices, of the art market, of the exchanges of stylistic and technical ideas between different parts of Europe. One of the major museum attractions in Europe last summer was an exhibition focusing on Jan van Eyck held in Bruges, and the catalogue of that show, **The Age of Van Eyck: The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430–1530** (Thames & Hudson, $60), edited by Till-Holger Borchert, contains a wide range of essays that suggest how scholars are now creating a portrait of van Eyck indirectly, by examining the world in which he lived. This volume, with its sixteen essays and fine layout and several hundred color illustrations, suggests a scholarly parallel to the kind of detailed yet panoramic approach that we know from the close-grained imagery of the Netherlandish painters.

Felix Thürlemann's **Robert Campin** (Prestel, $129) focuses on a Netherlandish painter who has had a kind of talismanic importance in New York since his Merode triptych became one of the treasures of the Cloisters half a century ago. Campin is a painter who at moments rivals van Eyck's scintillating naturalistic elegance, and yet his art is more earthbound, more direct. He lacks the aristocratic panache that van Eyck always exudes, and in this sense he seems at once less cosmopolitan and more representative of a rising middle class. Thürlemann, who has in the past written on Kandinsky and on semiotics, obviously has an appetite for the jostle of iconographic and formal questions that Campin's work raises. It is interesting to see him reaching to expand the work of this elusive master, re-attributing to Campin the *Descent From the Cross* in the Prado, previously believed to have been done early in his career by van der Weyden, who had studied with Campin. Thürlemann's book covers the great *Nativity* in Dijon, Campin's rare drawings, and copies of lost works, and it contains a thrilling discussion of what appears to be Campin's last work: the designs for a series of silk embroidered vestments, the *Paraments of the Order of the Golden Fleece*, which contain some one hundred fourteen figures and I am tempted to say are the greatest ecclesiastical garments designed by an artist until Matisse dreamed up the chasubles for the Chapel in Vence some five hundred years later.

Campin's Merode triptych is popular with book-jacket designers this season. It is on the cover not only of Thürlemann's volume, but also of **Great Altarpieces: Gothic and Renaissance** (Vendome Press, $150), which may be the most sumptuous art book of the year. In a long introduction and in essays dedicated to thirty altarpieces, Caterina Limentani Virdis and Mari Pietrogiovanna explore the extraordinary play of themes and variations, at once pictorial, architectural, and ecclesiastical, that shaped these multi-paneled images and exercised the imaginations of artists from Campin and van Eyck to Dürer and Mantegna. A special feature of this book is a group of fold-out plates that simulate the movable wings of various altarpieces, so that readers can actually feel that they are handling these complex architectural constructions, which often have on their outer panels monochromatic scenes of the Annunciation that mimic sculpture, and then open to reveal God's universe in blazing color. These foldouts help us grasp the almost cinematic resonances that could be achieved in the multi-panel altarpiece, with its echoes and affinities, its contrasted and rhymed places and spaces. *Great Altarpieces*, despite some unfortunately grainy close-ups, is gorgeous, but it is also a serious study of the interplay of structure and style in the era before painters had accepted the standardization of the rectangle.

IF *GREAT ALTARPIECES* punctures a modern prejudice about what a painting must look like, **Painted Prints: The Revelation of Color** (Pennsylvania State University Press, $35), the catalogue of a fascinating exhibition currently at the Baltimore Museum of Art, manages to shake up some very old assumptions about the nature of the graphic arts. Susan Dackerman begins with Erasmus's attack on the coloring of Dürer's prints, and suggests that this belief in the fundamental purity of black and white—which was reaffirmed some four hundred years later when Erwin Panofsky saluted Erasmus's view in his book on Dürer—has kept us from fully appreciating a whole range of chromatic possibilities. Dackerman's book is no mere postmodern reaction to what she seems to suggest is Panofsky's purism. She demonstrates that hand-coloring has been an integral element in printmaking since the fifteenth century. Beginning with the attractively rough-and-ready patches of

The Currency of Jellyfish

My parents were paying me sixpence a bucketful
for the bloodless slither and gloop I tipped out
on the grass behind the public convenience.
There had been a mass drowning,
but even death was something they seemed unsure about.
I angled the spade and slid one
like a dead sailor off a plank.
I am the resurrection and the life saith the Lord
and I wouldn't have been surprised if these
already ghosts were slinking back to the sea after dark.

It tested my stomach,
edging the spade in underneath
and handling each corpse to the bucket.
The surprising weight of it, the dead slap it made.
I tested the blade against that unresisting stuff
and shuddered. What must it be like
to have no bones, no guts, just that cloudy blue inside you?
I wobbled on my belly down the beach
with empty jellyfish thoughts, desperate for the sea,
till mum brought me back with a cheerful wave,
and *Good catch?* said my dad
sprinting by in trunks and goosepimples.

We walked the prom before bed.
Another tide had brought in hundreds more.
They lay like saints,
unharvested, luminous.

Jean Sprackland

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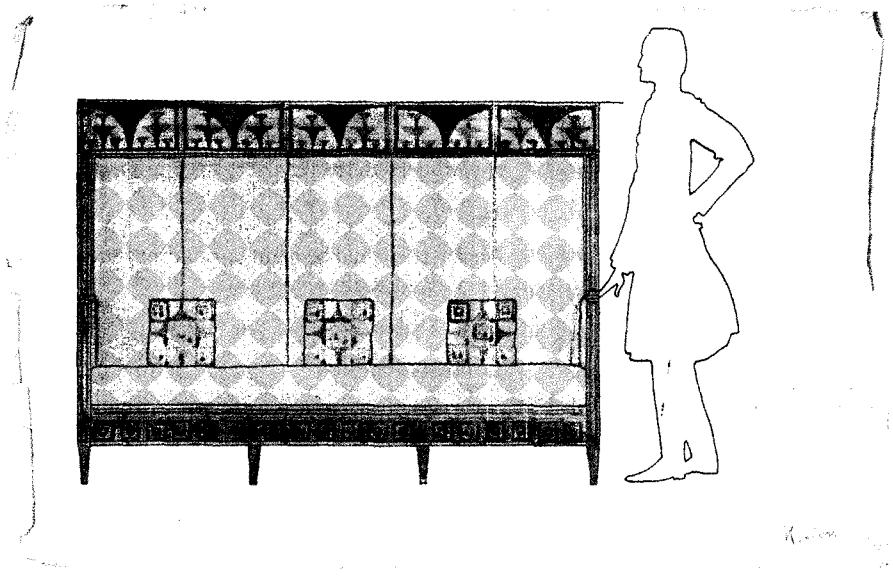
hue that were applied to fifteenth-century woodcuts, Dackerman pursues the subject all the way to the seventeenth century and Hercules Seger's exquisitely tinted landscape etchings. *Painted Prints* shows us the many ways in which applied color has been set in a rich, frequently subtle, and complex dynamic with the monochrome of the print.

Dackerman has swept past the old modern ideology that would have it that less is always more, while Andrew Morrall, in his excellent book **Jörg Breu the Elder: Art, Culture, and Belief in Reformation Augsburg** (Ashgate, $89.95), thrusts us into a tumultuous sixteenth-century Germany, where one ideology is directly confronting another, with powerful implications for the visual arts. Morrall has focused on a fascinating topic in the sociology of art, namely, the effect of the growing impact of Reformation ideas on an artist who made much of his living by painting religious pictures. Morrall explores Jörg Breu's move "from an affective to a cooler, de-sensualized style within the broader context of developing Protestant imagery"; he studies Breu's work in the decorative arts and his adoption of an increasingly classicizing manner. Yet Morrall knows that Breu never loses his emotional intensity. The artist brings an almost caricatural fascination with psychological states to his finest work; *The Raising of the Cross* (1524) suggests a homespun, slightly bumbling echo of Grünewald's terrifying stylizations. Breu kept a "Chronicle," a sort of diary in which he documented the gathering impact of the Reformation, and Morrall uses it and other sources to draw us into the mind of a painter who is essentially a workingman, exercised by the Gospels and suspicious of the elegant religiosity of the rich.

If the drift of much art-historical thinking in recent decades has suggested a growing reluctance to believe that any artist can act autonomously, the contextualist mood has also encouraged fresh explorations of the seemingly limitless capacity that artists have to act imaginatively within the constraints of whatever media are dominant in their time. The Renaissance tapestry exhibition mounted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art last winter was an unforgettable demonstration of the possibility for creative exploration within craft-tradition limitations, and Thürlemann's emphasis on Campin's designs for embroidery and Morrall's on Breu's work in stained glass underscore the fluidity with which a graphic imagination can accommodate itself to a variety of media. Troy's examination of Anni Albers and the interest in Peruvian textiles in early twentieth-century Germany reminds us that if some museumgoers are only now accepting the extent to which crafts traditions can match painting traditions for metaphoric and emotional richness, this is in fact an idea that made perfect sense to the artists and designers of the early twentieth century. Ever since William Morris began to revive medieval crafts in Victorian England, creative people were exploring the great variety of media that medieval and Renaissance artists had embraced almost as a matter of course. The Bauhaus was originally envisioned as reviving the medieval unity of the arts in a sort of machine-age version of the cathedral-builders.

In recent years a great deal of interest has focused on the objects produced in the Wiener Werkstätte, the workshops that Josef Hoffmann and his designer friends established in Vienna in 1903 to produce a seemingly endless stream of objects in which the sensuousness of Art Nouveau's curves was compressed, given a rectilinear rhythm and a cooler angularity. There appears to have been no end to the buyables that came from the drawing board of Koloman Moser—at least that is what you will believe after leafing through the pages of **Koloman Moser: Master of Viennese Modernism** (Thames & Hudson, $60). Moser designed graphics, pottery, metalwork, interiors, and even banknotes, and later devoted himself to painting, with fairly pathetic results. An equally wide range of material was produced by Dagobert Peche, another designer associated with the Wiener Werkstätte, who is the subject of **Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstätte** (Yale University Press, $75). I am underwhelmed by the work of both these designers. Moser never quite comes out from under Hoffmann's shadow. He strikes me as a man of good taste who is merely filling assignments, satisfying a market for thingamajigs to decorate those black-and-white interiors that defined Viennese chic. As for Peche, whose work is currently the subject of an exhibition at the Neue Galerie in New York (for which this book is the catalogue), I am nonplussed by his taste for over-scaled rehashes of Neoclassical and rococo forms. There is a theatrical shrillness to his work; the bulky legs and exaggerated angles that he gives to his furniture feel like a con artist's idea of fashion. He is Vienna's most fashionable hack.



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Koloman Moser, bench design for a breakfast room, 1903–1904

There is much that is glib in the decorative arts of the first quarter of the twentieth century, and certainly there are pages in Lisa Schlansker Kolosek's **The Invention of Chic: Thérèse Bonney and Paris Moderne** (Thames & Hudson, $45) where you feel as if you might as well be leafing through some dull Manhattan apartment featured in *Architectural Digest*. Bonney was an American who set up shop in Paris and in the 1920s and 1930s photographed all that was new in fashion and architecture and interior design, and although she is not an especially interesting photographer, her sheer persistence pays off. Bonney, who wore clothes designed by Sonia Delaunay and had her portrait painted by Dufy, with whom she was good friends, offers an unsinkable vision of a platinum and chrome Paris that was erased by World War II. As you turn the pages of *The Invention of*

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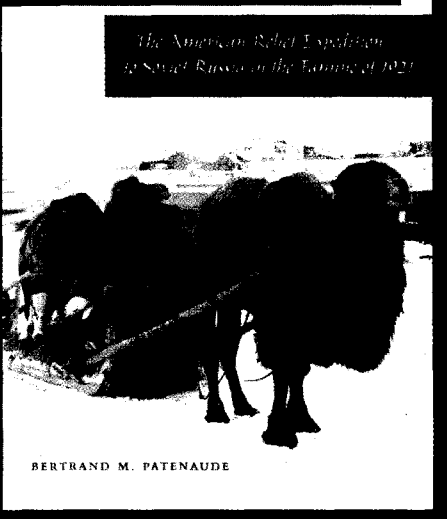
Chic, you feel yourself drifting through a lost metropolis, where each shop and café and nightclub and apartment is decked out in tubular furniture and exotic woods and the endless angles of Art Deco.

The books that are appearing this season give us the opportunity to track the evolution of fashionable visual taste right on through the decades. Christopher Long's **Josef Frank: Life and Work** (University of Chicago Press, $70) covers the life of an architect who started out in Vienna, produced designs for the Wiener Werkstätte, and ended up in Sweden, where he was a pioneer in the less prepossessing style of interior design that would come to be known as Swedish Modern. Frank's work as an architect and as a designer of furniture and fabrics and much else shows how the exaggerated rectilinearity of the Viennese style could be leavened with an easier-going kind of wit, with a feeling for the simpler forms of rustic wooden furniture and folk designs. Yet another version of modern elegance, this one forever associated with postwar Manhattan, is provided by Kerry William Purcell's **Alexey Brodovitch** (Phaidon, $75), a study of the legendary graphic designer and photographer. Brodovitch shaped the casual look of *Harper's Bazaar* from the 1930s to the 1950s; published *Ballet*, in which his own crazily blurred, romantic photographs are matched with a text by Edwin Denby; and edited a short-lived magazine of the graphic arts called *Portfolio*. For several decades Brodovitch defined a seize-the-moment elegance in design, a style based on freeze-frame photography and quirky typefaces and asymmetrical compositions, all combined for haughty panache.

To turn the pages of these books about the men and women who shaped the look of the fashionable world is great fun, but after luxuriating in this material for a while you may begin to find that the experience is also a little stifling. You feel the vigor of the lives of Moser, Peche, and Brodovitch; you experience their wit and their ingenuity; you may well want to run out and buy some of the things that they created. And yet there is an undercurrent of melancholy in these studies of styles past. Maybe the problem is that the whole world of early modern and midcentury modern design is still too close for comfort. Although there can be nobody alive now who actually lived in their prime in a Wiener Werkstätte interior, the subject still has a valedictory quality, as if we were meditating on the way we were. What is ripe for collecting is not necessarily ripe for history—not yet.

The Big Show in Bololand



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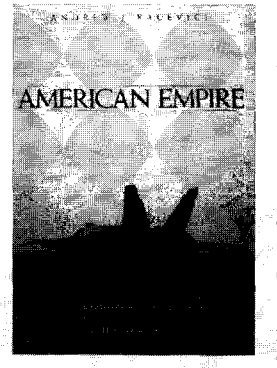

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Many of the books and exhibitions that are devoted to this material seem to be fueled by a desire to sustain the mood of an earlier period as a kind of personal fantasy. These projects can become symptoms of the very taste that they seek to define.

In the books about decoration that I would count as classics, such as Cyril Connolly's *Les Pavillons* and Mario Praz's *Illustrated History of Furnishing*, there is a literary power to the prose itself, so that the visual-fantasy element in interior décor is complicated by the verbal fantasy that the writer weaves. In a sense every text in an art book re-ignites an old competition between the value of the image and the value of the word. Balthus comments in *Vanished Splendors* that the brief sections into which he has broken up his memories are meant to echo Montaigne's essays, and although the comparison is ludicrous, it does serve to remind us that when the painter commits a paragraph to print he is submitting to another set of rules. Aldo Buzzi, a friend of Steinberg's who assisted in the writing of *Reflections and Shadows*, explains in a note that at the time of his death Steinberg was withholding the finished book from publication, fearful, Buzzi surmises, that it was not up to his artistic standards.

Any art book raises the question of what the writer can do for the artist, and this is the case even when the writer also happens to be the artist. The measured voice of a scholarly text can reflect an author's quietly impassioned admiration for the freewheeling power of an artist; the writer's very reticence in the face of the visual material can be a way of framing the artist's flights of fancy. This is the effect of Meyer Schapiro's writing, which has a plainspoken, conversational tone that sometimes suggests a certain kind of lover's fervor. An author can also go in a completely different direction, as Pierre Schneider does in his book on Matisse, in which he pairs his elaborate considerations with an astonishing surfeit of images, and invites us to see how the velocity of his prose evokes the exploratory richness of a suite of Matisse's drawings. However the author means to relate word to image, what ultimately matters is that what we are reading suggests a respect for what we are seeing. That respect, I would surmise, is always grounded in some fundamental modesty, in the writer's need to prove that it is in fact worth taking the trouble to describe what, having been seen, perhaps need not be described. ■

Advertisements for Himself

By JAMES WOLCOTT

How to Be Alone by Jonathan Franzen

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 278 pp., $24)

NOEL COWARD HAD a talent to amuse. Jonathan Franzen has the knack to annoy. Is it a conscious gift? Is he aware of how grating his pleaful moans and hopeful sighs have become? (It's like a snore turned inside out.) Or is he intentionally irritating us, passive-aggressively wearing down his readers' resistance until we finally crack and agree with what he thinks and, more importantly, how he feels? How he felt in the 1990s was melancholy. The country was partying, but he was gnawing on a dry bone. He evokes his sunken condition with a litany of "d" words: darkness, depression, despair ("My despair about the American novel began in the winter of 1991..."). The good news delivered by *How to Be Alone* for anyone who cares is that Franzen's downbeat mood has begun to lift.

No longer a miserabilist, Franzen has made a separate peace with the anachronistic calling of being a serious writer in America, a lighthouse keeper who refuses to desert his post. In the personal essays that make up his first collection (which includes a couple of straight reporting pieces to give the book some fiber content), Franzen fuses the roles of fiction writer, social commentator, and concerned citizen, qualifying earlier positions and making amends for being an impetuous hothead in his Shelleyan youth. "I used to be a very angry and theory-minded person," he half-apologizes. "I used to consider it apocalyptically worrisome that Americans watch a lot of TV and don't read much Henry James.... I used to think that our American political economy was a vast cabal whose specific aim was to thwart my artistic ambitions, exterminate all that I found lovely in civilization, and also rape and murder the planet in the process." In that order of importance.

As a nonfiction advocate for his one-man novelistic cause, Franzen doesn't ape the Norman Mailer of *Advertisements for Myself* and flaunt his ambition like a Popeye tattoo, muscling aside the competition to clear more legroom for himself in the first-class section. Nor does he try to blow up the rickety structures blocking his own fictional constructions, like Tom Wolfe in some of his broadsides. As with so many of his generation, Franzen is conflicted about conflict. Arguing is what grownups do when they are mad (Mommy, Daddy, don't fight); and swagger doesn't play well on the current scene, which has partly converted into a Generation X recovery ward for the depressed, medicated, and formerly addicted children of divorce. Rather than swinging from the heels, he hugs the ropes in these essays, taking all the pain, the indignity, and the bland indifference that a mass-media culture can inflict on a passionate bookworm. He is not a masochist, he is a shrewd passive-aggressive (aren't they all?), courting sympathy by constantly telling us where he hurts and fastening reader interest on himself, regardless of the issue or controversy. No matter what is flying around Franzen, the soft-focus lens is always on him.

In "Erika Imports," a brief reminiscence about a job that Franzen held during his high school years working for a German émigré couple, he ruminates, "Now everyone is dead, and I wonder: Is there no escaping the personal?" For him, no. When the Starr Report was lobbed raw into the country's lap, he wasn't appalled by it as a document dump of politically motivated dirt, a gross misuse of prosecutorial powers, or a hypocritical display of neo-Puritanism. "I wasn't offended by the sex qua sex," he testifies in "Imperial Bedroom," an examination of privacy in a prying media world:

JAMES WOLCOTT is a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair* and the author of *The Catsitters* (HarperCollins).

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> I wasn't worrying about a potential future erosion of my own rights; I didn't feel the President's pain in the empathic way he'd once claimed to feel mine; I wasn't repelled by the revelation that public officials do bad things; and, although I'm a registered Democrat, my disgust was of a different order from my partisan disgust at the news that the Giants have blown a fourth-quarter lead. What I felt I felt personally. I was being intruded on.... The report's mere existence so offended my sense of privacy that I could hardly bring myself to touch the thing.

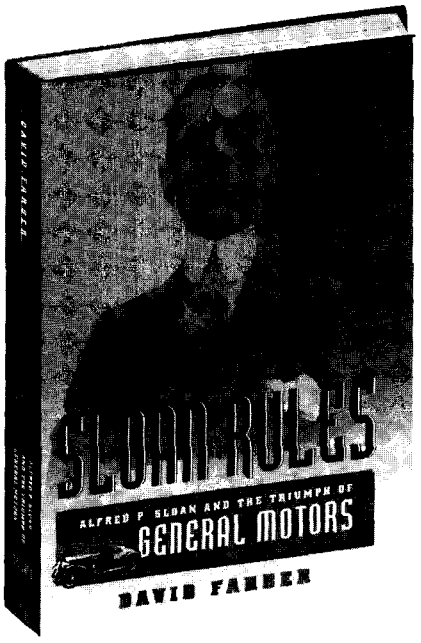
He is able to forge ahead, however, when a graver intrusion threatens to interfere with his livelihood, or at least to throw a shadow.

"My third novel, *The Corrections*, which I'd worked on for many years, was published a week before the World Trade Center fell," begins the introductory note to *How to Be Alone*, making it sound as if the buildings keeled over by themselves. The shatter and grief of mass murder and gouging devastation seemed to call for a ceremonial stillness. "This was a time when it seemed that the voices of self and commerce ought to fall silent—a time when you wanted, in Nick Carraway's phrase, 'the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever.' Nevertheless, business is business. Within forty-eight hours of the calamity, I was giving interviews again." Well, a boy has to hustle his book, as Truman Capote was fond of saying, but even so I gasped when I hit the sentence "Nevertheless, business is business." Nearly three thousand people die and he shrugs "Nevertheless" as if he's clearing crumbs off the table?

Since *The Corrections* went on to sell more than two million copies in hardcover worldwide, making it the publishing event of 2001, the terrorist attacks obviously didn't rain cinders on Franzen's parade. Business was pretty damned good. The cover of the reviewers' galleys for *How to Be Alone*, photographed at the Three Lives bookstore in Greenwich Village, shows a woman browsing through a book with a copy of *The Corrections* set prominently on the table next to her. Perhaps the publishers thought this would be too self-reflexive even for Franzen, because *The Corrections* has been removed from the cover of the finished book and replaced with a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*. An amusing switcheroo, but it doesn't dispel the impression that *How to Be Alone* is a flag planted on the alpine peak of the novel's commercial and critical triumph, a brand-name tie-in.

The irony is that *The Corrections* was such a runaway hit that the maid-of-constant-sorrow ballads that Franzen sings in some of these essays ring a little hollow now. When he writes, "I intend this book, in part, as a record of a movement away from an angry and frightened isolation toward an acceptance—even a celebration—of being a reader and writer," a reader could be forgiven for thinking, "Hell, if I'd hit the jackpot, I'd be ready to celebrate too. Where are my boogie shoes?"

THE LONGEST ESSAY in *How to Be Alone* is a revised version of Franzen's famous five-thousand-word soul cry and forelock tug on the plight of the American novelist that was first published in *Harper's* under the title "Perchance to Dream" and is more commonly known as "the *Harper's* essay." After rereading it years later, Franzen concedes that he sounded a wee hysterical swaying over literature's open grave and eulogizing its passing by pointing the finger of blame at an indifferent, instant-gratification society. The essay was an outburst of frustrated idealism, "written from [a] place of anger and despair," he explains in the foreword. Having left a place of anger



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—*Publishers Weekly*

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and despair for a nicer suite, he has cut the *Harper's* essay by a quarter, reined in its bronco rhetoric, and retitled it "Why Bother?"

Even abbreviated, it is long and leaden. Nearly every sentiment and idea that Franzen relays about the fallen preeminence of literature has been expressed before, and better. No one needs to be reminded for the umpteenth time that Dickens was a popular sensation and that the audiences that once clamored at the docks for news of Little Nell now queue at the multiplex or congregate in cyberspace. Like Broadway, the fabulous invalid, the serious novel has seemed poised to breathe its last ever since electricity entered the home. As a cultural analyst, Franzen is simply the latest to join the chorus line of declinism: Gore Vidal has been signing the novel's death certificate for a half-century; Saul Bellow was flinching from the neon blare of the entertainment society in the 1950s; Ted Solataroff's *American Review* ran a symposium over several issues in the early 1970s in which the top critics and fiction writers of the day, wrestling with the prophecies of Marshall McLuhan, made long faces and pondered their obsolescence ("To begin at the beginning: There is no writing for glory any more—not great big glory, anyway," wrote Wilfrid Sheed, and he was one of the cheerier ones); and today we have Harold Bloom, Neil Postman, and others serving as pallbearers.

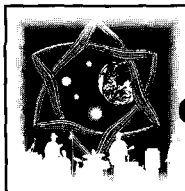
The difference is that Franzen makes his state of mind the social indicator, his mood at any given moment the measure of literature's misery index. He tortures the significance out of an incident in Paula Fox's novel *Desperate Characters* ("A generation ago, by paying close attention, Paula Fox could discern in a broken ink bottle both perdition and salvation"), but the most desperate character in this essay is Franzen himself, lost in America and longing to connect without having to leave the premises (a common malady among us drudges). When a social scientist named Shirley Brice Heath, who has studied the reading habits of children and how they persist into adulthood, looks Franzen in the eye during an interview and declares, "You are a socially isolated individual who desperately wants to communicate with a substantive imaginary world," she scores a telepathic bull's-eye. "I felt as if she were looking into my soul" is Franzen's awestruck reaction.

IN THE ABSENCE of private and informal networkings (ranging from the clubs and coffeehouses of Samuel Johnson's London to the salons of Paris to the Algonquin Round Table to the crash pads of the Beats), writers tend to devolve into mole people and pack rats, sandbagged at their desks by mounds of books, magazines, newspapers, folders, and manuscript pages. During his most militant isolationist phase, Franzen walled himself off even more than most, toiling inside a deprivation tank where he spurned invitations to teach, avoided parties, declined to review books or to discuss writing ("To speak extranovelistically in an age of personalities seemed to me a betrayal"), and did his best to insulate his brain from the hubbub of world events ("Even deep in my Queens neighborhood, however, news could reach me through my TV set and my *Times* subscription," he reports, as if he were getting faint signals over the wireless). In a country inhospitable to creativity, he and his wife have a hard time finding a patch of sunlight in the asphalt jungle, moving from one town without pity to another. "Finally, after exhaustive deliberation, we'd rented a too-expensive house in yet another depressed city"—welcome to Philadelphia—where Franzen languished in front of the raybox. "Even as I was sanctifying the reading of literature, however, I was becoming so depressed that I could do little after dinner but flop in front of the TV. We didn't have cable, but I could always find something delicious: Phillies and Padres, Eagles and Bengals, *M*A*S*H*, *Cheers*, *Homicide*." (The Phillies, delicious?)

The daily dose only intensifies Franzen's sense of estrangement from the popular culture, since he frames his existence "in the context of Raskolnikov and Quentin Compson, not David Letterman or Jerry Seinfeld." When he and the wife with whom he shares this "self-enforced solitude" separate, it compounds the aloneness that is his capital as a writer. He is alone when he reads. Alone when he writes. And never more alone than when what he writes is unread. As he says elsewhere in the book, "We don't blame the audience for defecting, we know it hurts to have to stay conscious, we understand the need to drug yourself, to feel the warmth of the up-to-the-minute hipness or whatever. But the loss of that audience makes us feel all the more alone. Aloneness makes the burden of knowledge heavier." The author's photo for the book looks like a hostage shot, Franzen holding himself captive and refusing to free himself until we accept the terms of his release.

THE SOLE RELIEF from the thick syrup of platitude and pretentious solipsism poured on every paragraph in this essay—"It's possible to have a general sense of history's darkness, a mystical Dionysian conviction that the game ain't over till it's over, without having enough of an Apollonian grasp of the details to appreciate its consolations" is how Franzen introduces his belated discovery that Herman Melville had it rougher than today's M.F.A. graduates ("I wish ... that he'd been able to say to himself, when he was struggling to support Lizzie and their kids: Hey, if worse comes to worst, I can always teach writing")—the sole relief is an epistle from Don DeLillo, to whom Franzen had written "in distress" in his crisis of faith about fiction. (One wishes he had reprinted his S.O.S. call. *Dear Don, I can't go on any longer....*) An actual grownup, DeLillo addresses Franzen's fear and sense of futility with a calm, realistic encouragement that seems to walk upright across the page after all of the essay's handwringing impersonation of Hamlet at the computer.

How to Be Alone traces the arc of Franzen's acceptance of the solitary nature of being a writer and reader at the fadeout of "the Age of the Written Word." As he told Charlie Rose in a recent interview, "Somehow I got from that point of feeling really radically alone and despairing to feeling like, 'Yes, I'm alone, and it's good to be alone.'" In "Scavenging," which ends with Franzen rescuing a crummy chair from "a delicious trash pile" to take home and restore (making him a pioneer in the school of "Shabby Chic"), he invests the rotary phone, the tape deck, and other rinky-dink devices to which he is fondly attached with a poignant awareness of the novelist's own outmodedness. Only now he finds solace in being destined for



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the flea market. "I now believe obsolescence is not a darkness but a beauty: not perdition but salvation," he affirms.

> The more headlong the progress of technological development, the greater volume of detritus. And the detritus isn't simply material. It's angry religion, resurgent countercultural ideologies, the newly unemployed, the eternally unemployable. These are the fiction writers' guarantee that they will never be alone. Ineluctable obsolescence is our legacy.

Perhaps he is rehearsing his Nobel Prize speech.

FRANZEN'S BOOK PRESENTS the portrait of a man who can't leave being alone well enough alone. For someone who repeatedly strikes a Garbo pose in print, he puts a lot of low-key effort into refining his identity. He is very picky about how he is perceived by all those strangers whom he is ducking. Although he chain-smokes as he types (or did at the time he was writing "Sifting the Ashes"), he doesn't want to be lumped in with his fellow wheezers, stating for the record that "I don't consider myself a smoker, don't identify with the forty-six million Americans who have the habit." Unlike the millions of nicotine fiends who first lit up out of peer pressure or misguided glamour, Franzen the smoking non-smoker cracked open his first pack in a defiant act of political defeatism. "I took up smoking as a student in Germany in the dark years of the early eighties. Ronald Reagan had recently made his 'evil empire' speech, and Jonathan Schell was publishing *The Fate of the Earth*." He figured that if the superpowers were racing to erase the planet in a nuclear puff, he might as well launch a pre-emptive strike on the lungs. "Indeed, there was something invitingly apocalyptic about cigarettes. The nightmare of nuclear proliferation had a counterpart in the way cigarettes—anonymous, death-bearing, missilelike cylinders—proliferated in my life.... The fear of a global nuclear holocaust was thus functionally identical to my private fear of death." Older now, less in love with easeful death, Franzen has to reconcile thanatos and eros ("Smoking may not look sexy to me anymore, but it still *feels* sexy"), which is no easy trick. Arriving right on cue is one of those convenient last-paragraph vignette-ish epiphanies that has him spotting a woman leaning against the window-sash of a Tribeca apartment and blowing cigarette smoke into the sultry air. "I fell in love at first sight as she stood there, both inside and outside, inhaling contradiction and breathing out ambivalence."

In "Books in Bed," a roundup of sexual how-to guides that elicits the coy admission "I have no objection to a nice bra, still less to being invited to remove one" (down, tiger), Franzen again fidgets to set himself slightly apart. "The last thing I want is to be reminded of the vaguely icky fact that across the country millions of other people are having sex," he writes, horrified by all that humping going on down along the railroad shacks. "This is the conundrum of the individual confronting masses about which he can't help knowing more than he'd like to know: I want to be alone, but not too alone. I want to be the same but different." Bedding down with a good novel satisfies that want. "[T]hough I'm alone in bed with a book, I don't feel alone. For a moment, I belong to a group neither as big as a statistically significant sample nor as small as the naked self. It's a group of two, the faithful writer and the trusting reader [the Lone Ranger and Tonto]. We're different but the same."

ALONE. TOGETHER. INSIDE yet outside. Outside yet inside. The same but different. Different but the same. It's a shame Franzen couldn't just grow a Siamese twin, keep himself company, and leave the rest of us out of it. He cannot even engage in political activity without communing with his irreducible self. The last chapter of *How to Be Alone* recounts a long bus ride into Washington, D.C. to take part in a march against the inauguration of George W. Bush. It's a not bad *New Yorker* "Talk of the Town" dispatch—wryly observed, properly civic-minded, wistfully bittersweet (Updike's early "Talk" pieces had this lyric note of instant nostalgia)—until the inevitable inward stare in search of deeper meaning. As he re-enters New York,

> Rain is freezing on the ground, snow covering the slush. You may still be one version of yourself, the version from the bus, the younger and redder version, as long as you're waiting for the subway and riding home. But then you peel off the thermal layers, still damp, of the long's day's costume, and you see a wholly different kind of costume hanging in your closet [his Lone Ranger outfit]; and in the shower you're naked and alone.

He was expecting guests?

Jonathan Franzen must be stopped, and yet he can't be stopped, because the catapulting success of *The Corrections*

The Gamekeeper's Night Dog

By Dave Putnam

In the late 19th century Britain was a superpower. The zenith of her power was the decade prior to the Boer War, a conflict that brought the superpower to her knees. Unlike America after Vietnam, Britain never truly recovered from the Boer War. The Gamekeeper's Night Dog is a fast paced alternate history novel that turns the Boer War into a British Desert Storm. The novel answers the question: How would the world be different if Great Britain had not faltered?

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has granted him a lifetime permit to pontificate—a license to preen. The most unintentionally hilarious sentence in *How to Be Alone* is his offhand comment "In a sense, I'm proud of not being like everybody else." In a sense?! His entire persona rests upon the pride he takes in not being like everybody else, a reluctant nonconformist—a shade different and slightly better; a bit of a snob perhaps, but considerate enough not to flaunt it. ("All people should be elitists—and keep it to themselves.") You don't need a black belt in reverse psychology to recognize that when someone acts shy and "little me" in essay after essay, strumming the same muted chord from the stage of prominent magazines, what he really craves is public attention. He wants his individuality validated. (True recluses such as DeLillo and Anne Tyler do not post regular bulletins as to their non-whereabouts and unavailability.)

The truth hops out of the bag in "Why Bother?" when Franzen mourns "the failure of my culturally engaged novel [*The Twenty-Seventh City*, which he hoped would sell "a zillion copies"] to engage with the culture. I'd intended to provoke; what I got instead was sixty reviews in a vacuum." Considering how the overwhelming majority of novels creep in and out of print like refugees crossing the border, most novelists would be gratified—thrilled—to receive sixty reviews. It's as if Franzen expected those sixty reviews to form a constellation in the sky—a mandala.

Which is why so many people were put off by his petulance after *The Corrections* was chosen as an Oprah Book Club selection. He had wrung his handkerchief in *Harper's* over not being able to engage the culture, and when the culture accepted the engagement he got cold feet. If he had rejected outright being labeled an "Oprah author," the entire staff of Farrar, Straus and Giroux might have downed Jonestown Kool-Aid and crawled under their desks to die, but he would have been credited in the press with taking a decisive stand. Or, conversely, if he had accepted the tap of Oprah's fairy wand graciously, realizing his good fortune in being able to leap to the top of the best-seller list in a single bound, he could have weathered the hullabaloo like a good sport. In fairness, he did try at first. In "Meet Me in St. Louis," he recounts his mortifying attempt to give the Oprah producers what they want by letting a crew follow him around his old neighborhood, filming him as he tries to gaze meaningfully at a tree. Finally, he snaps: "This is so fundamentally bogus!" But he doesn't walk off the shoot; he schleps to the next location ("my job is to stand or walk near trains and look contemplative"), and continues to breathe out ambivalence, airing his qualms, complaining about the Oprah sticker on the jacket cover, and announcing that the typical Oprah title was a "schmaltzy, one-dimensional" book that made him "cringe."

To spare him the flinching discomfort of having his novel fêted on national television, Winfrey withdrew the invitation to appear on her broadcast and soon afterward lowered the lid on the Oprah Book Club as a regular feature. Franzen may have skunked it for other authors, but the clamor pro and con was a publicity coup. Cynthia Ozick recently cited Franzen as someone who became a celebrity by spurning celebrity: "[He] had declined celebrity, he had scorned it, he had thumbed his nose at it. It was because for him celebrity was a scandal, an embarrassment. It shamed him. It demeaned him. It was the opposite of his desire." Shades of Stephen Dedalus's *non serviam*. But celebrity was decidedly not the opposite of Franzen's desire, and he did not so much thumb his nose as scratch it and look sheepish. If celebrity was an embarrassment, it was an embarrassment of riches. As Franzen told a London interviewer regarding his post-*Corrections* fame, "I could have gotten by on five percent of the recognition. The rest has become a bit of a problem." He also compared book tours to an unpleasant illness, saying that he got through them by "doing what I'm told." Business is business.

A PIOUS OPPORTUNIST, Franzen earnestly lobbies for the literary theory that affords him best commercial advantage, that improves his position in the marketplace. The stance that he takes is always a step on the escalator going up. When he felt marooned as an author of highbrow fiction, he longed to shatter the library hush of "the silence of irrelevance," but his sympathies remained with the cranky fictionists who refused to curry popular favor, especially William Gaddis, author of *The Recognitions*. "For a long time, trying to follow Gaddis's example, I took a hard line on letting my work speak for itself.... I had a cosmology of silent heroes and gregarious traitors." The new, gregarious, semi-outgoing Franzen now abjures his former hero, and patronizes him. In "Mr. Difficult," a *New Yorker* essay published too late for inclusion in *How to Be Alone* that reeks of archness, Franzen documents his disillusionment with Gaddis as artist-exemplar and gnomic gray eminence. As a criticism of the anfractuosities of Gaddis's thick-piled, parched narratives, "Mr. Difficult" is persuasive to those of us who find even a shorter Gaddis (*Carpenter's Gothic*) as dry and gnarled as driftwood; but the essay's chief mission isn't to "place" Gaddis among the postwar novelists but to use him as a prop to measure the progress of Franzen's own development. It's always about him.

Once upon a time Franzen pledged allegiance to the modernist canon, but now he committed infidelity in his heart. "I craved academic and hipster respect of the kind that Pynchon and Gaddis got and Saul Bellow and Ann Beattie didn't. But Bellow and Beattie, not to mention Dickens and Conrad and Brontë and Dostoyevsky and Christina Stead, were the writers I actually, unhiply enjoyed." Never mind that Ann Beattie and her sister-brother minimalists were very much the rage in the 1980s, or that the author of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* never sought "hipster respect." Who in his right mind reads the classics calculating whether Dostoyevsky and Brontë (which one: Emily? Charlotte? Anne?) are hip or unhip to enjoy? Only a budding writer-politician, a junior pollster. Now that Franzen has reconciled himself with being an unabashed, accessible storyteller—the John Gardner prose-philosopher of the post-postmodern era—he is regretfully consigning Gaddis and the "difficult novel" to the scrap heap. It is a symbolic act of parricide on Franzen's part. "Regarding Gaddis's two posthumously published books, I feel the way I did when my father was in a nursing home. Unless you're a very good friend, it's better not to see him suffering." Considering that Franzen's father died of Alzheimer's, his deterioration the subject of the first piece in *How to Be Alone*, the comparison could hardly be more pointed.

Having emptied the hospital beds and shucked the ascetic aesthetic of his cigar-store Indian forefathers, Franzen is free to embrace the pleasure principle. He has become a literary epicurean, instructing the readers of *The New Yorker*, "Think of the novel as lover: Let's stay home tonight and have a great time. Just because you're touched where you want to be touched, it doesn't mean you're cheap; before a book can change you, you have to love it." If only S. J. Perelman were alive to do homage to this conceit, the sultry novel beckoning in the doorway in a pink teddy, her almond eyes moist with the promise of an enticing simile. And if fiction be the food of love, Franzen purrs, think of the novelist "as the cook who prepares, as a gift to the reader, this many-course meal. It's not all ice cream, but sautéed broccoli rabe has charms of its own." I say it's spinach and I say the hell with it. ■

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continued from page 4

was reviewing did not quote any. I stand by my description of rage and self-pity as the dominant emotions of the genre, whether exploited by white or black performers. Tenderness, pity, regret, longing, self-questioning, joy, and sorrow are feelings one can easily associate with many songs of the Gershwin-Ellington era and with the playing of jazz artists such as Louis Armstrong, Teddy Wilson, Sidney Bechet, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Joe Pass, Kenny Barron, and countless others. Put any of those feelings onto a rap track and you would crack the genre in two. One may tell false art from true art precisely by this arbitrary restriction on the range of feelings allowed. I do not deny, of course, that there exists a *bought* interest in rap. It has become the staple of many former rock and pop-music stations and is now covered with some frequency in *The New York Times*. This process of legitimation still seems to me worth resisting.

Political economy

To the editors:

Clearly, Alan Wolfe doesn't like the direction in which contemporary political science is heading ("Paths of Dependence," October 14). It has become enmeshed, he claims, in disputes about theory, has abandoned a "commitment to understanding politics in the real world," and fails "to prevent scholars from being as abstract or as irrelevant as they choose to be." These complaints are remarkably misplaced in a review of my book, which uses political science to examine a subject that Wolfe recognizes to be of paramount importance: the development and future of the American welfare state. *The Divided Welfare State* tackles questions at the heart of present political debates: Why does the United States rely so heavily on private employment-based health and pension benefits? How did tax breaks for and government regulations of these benefits come about? And what effects has the heavily "privatized" character of U.S. social policy had on American politics, policy, and the lives of citizens?

Wolfe contends that the "best that the observer can do is to understand a particular situation in all its complexity (which, by the way, Hacker . . . does). Any theoretical musings beyond that serve little or no purpose." What Wolfe fails to recognize, however, is that the theory and the story are necessarily intertwined. If my account provides a convincing interpretation of U.S. social welfare history—as Wolfe apparently believes—it does so precisely because it is motivated by a consistent theoretical framework that makes sense of seemingly disjointed events and otherwise puzzling realities. Indeed, without concepts that extend beyond a "particular situation," analysts would find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer mass of details that they confront, and they would be hard-pressed to formulate even modest general conclusions that could apply to similar situations or problems.

The concept of "path dependence" that Wolfe criticizes allows me, for example, to answer the crucial question of why the United States lacks national health insurance. I use the concept to demonstrate that early choices and events—particularly the failure of Franklin Roosevelt to pursue a health plan and the demise of Harry S Truman's health proposal—helped cement in place tax-subsidized private health insurance at the same time that private retirement plans built on top of the existing Social Security program. Perhaps the most revealing effect of this divergence was the strikingly different stance that business groups developed toward Social Security (surprisingly supportive, at least during its early years, because it offset their private pension costs) and national health insurance (bitterly opposed as a threat to existing private plans). The larger implication is that America's exceptionally limited public-sector welfare state is not merely a result of our nation's distinctive political culture and institutions but also a reflection of the early development of and extensive government support for private benefits in the United States—which set in motion self-reinforcing processes, from the weakening of organized labor's commitment to universal programs to the heavy reliance of Americans on workplace protections, that made public programs a much harder sell here than they were abroad.

Given our shared interest in an engaged and relevant political science, I suspect that Wolfe's real disagreements are with the discipline rather than with me. All I can say in this regard is that I wish my book had not been caught in a fusillade that looks to me a lot like friendly fire.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Joy Ride

EVERY AFTERNOON, THE Plaza Hotel in New York City serves a proper tea. While gray dowagers dominate the clientele, little girls are nestled in the crowd as well, munching on Nutella and banana sandwiches. The Palm Court might seem an odd place for a kid to spend the afternoon, but I suspect the girls are enormously excited. To understand why, look no further than the lobby, where there is an enormous portrait of their heroine, Eloise.

YOU MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE MADE the acquaintance of Eloise, the fictional six-year-old star of a series of best-selling children's books, who lives on the top floor of the Plaza. Eloise lives without parental authority. Her mother sends plane tickets and cash from undisclosed locations; her father is completely absent. Nominally supervised by her British nanny, the precocious ruffian answers only to herself. Eloise spends her days roaming the labyrinthine hotel, crashing weddings and hijacking elevators. She jets to Paris and Moscow in the company of her dog Weenie and her turtle Skipperdee. She takes liberties with language: Eloise doesn't "get up" every morning—she "sklathes" herself out of bed. The four Eloise volumes created by the late Kay Thompson and the illustrator Hilary Knight in the 1950s turned millions of little girls into Eloise acolytes. Now Knight has come out with a fifth in the series: *Eloise Takes a Bawth*. I bought it last week as a gift for a friend's toddler. It joins on my bookshelf *Eloise* and *Eloise in Paris*—books I'd also intended to give away.

I FELL IN LOVE WITH ELOISE AS A kindergartener, when I carried the first volume around with me like a permanent appendage. She was my favorite female children's book character by far. Nancy Drew, while preternaturally accomplished, had the personality of an inflated Barbie doll. Madeleine was spirited but too serious. The eponymous heroine of *Harriet the Spy* was resourceful and bright yet lacked Eloise's charm. Granted, Eloise could be bratty. But she was also irresistible. Her rich, urban existence was profoundly exotic to a little girl marooned in the Northern Virginia suburbs. Eloise dined at Maxim's in Paris wearing pink bunny slippers. She ordered drinks like "straight Johnnie Walker Black without ice" from room service (punctuating the order with her signature, "And charge it please. Thank you very much!"). Her mother knew Coco Chanel, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, and, of course, the owner of the Plaza. It was heady stuff for a young reader whose leitmotifs were the Brownies and neighborhood soccer games. The rich, they are different from you and me. And how.

BUT WHAT MADE ELOISE SPECIAL wasn't just her outrageous affluence, as was the case for her comic book counterpart, Richie Rich. And it wasn't just her tomboy antics, like those of Pippi Longstocking, literally a poor girl's version of Eloise. Eloise was a tomboy with panache. On a trip to Moscow, she rode her tricycle across the frozen Baltic Sea. Back at the Plaza, she poured a bottle of wine down the mail chute. I derived a special pleasure from those escapades and some comfort, too. Even as a kid, I recognized that being a girl carried distinct disadvantages. The "boys will be boys" ethos allowed a range of behavior—from wreaking havoc on the playground to biking after dusk—that seemed off-limits to those with the double-X chromosome. And yet, here was Eloise, my literary mascot, doing precisely what she wanted. She breathed life into the trope "girls can do anything boys can do."

SHE ALSO DEMONSTRATED THAT THE converse wasn't true. Eloise possessed attributes foreign to male children's book protagonists. Take Tintin. Like Eloise, he journeyed to exotic corners of the globe. And he did cool things, such as battle the Abominable Snowman with James Bond-ish aplomb. But, while courageous and focused, Tintin was utterly lacking in mirth. Eloise, by contrast, exploited the female license to be idiosyncratic, if not outright frivolous. She watched television with a parasol "in case there's some sort of glare." She insisted on bathing with a raccoon hat in case the water was cold. Both Eloise and Alexander—of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*—end their days with a soak in the tub. But Eloise doesn't just take a bath. She takes a *bawth*—and floods New York's most venerable hotel in the process.

THOMPSON SAID SHE WAS WRITING not for children but for "precocious grown-ups." She may be onto something because, in some ways, I appreciate Eloise even more now that I am the same age as her mother. I am drawn to her version of the so-called feminine advantage. It clashes with the message that women are bombarded with today: namely, that the benefit of being female hinges on exploiting sex appeal. The best example of this is another Manhattan heroine, "Sex and the City"'s Carrie Bradshaw. Carrie and her three comrades-in-arms are held out as the epitome of female autonomy. And, as they traipse through innumerable bedrooms and score yet another pair of Manolo Blahniks, you do get the impression they enjoy being women. They offer evidence that there are benefits to being a girl—but those benefits mainly have to do with boys. While this quartet may shun long-term relationships, their identity is inextricably linked to attracting and seducing men.

ELOISE, BY CONTRAST, DOESN'T TAIlor her behavior to suit anyone but herself. Whether she's leaping into a Bolshoi Ballet performance or spraying her bare feet with seltzer water at a ritzy Parisian café, Eloise's focus is maximizing opportunities for pleasure. And those frissons of enjoyment don't come from accruing clothes or being a babe. Christian Dior may have been her personal designer, but Eloise wears the same uniform—pink bloomers, black jumper, and shiny Mary Janes—every day. And her identity doesn't depend on being attractive. As the book jacket acknowledges, "She is not yet pretty, but she is already a Person." The implication, of course, is that Personhood is more desirable than being merely pretty.

MAYBE GIRLS WHO MAKE THEIR pilgrimage to the Palm Court for tea will remember that message as they grow up. Following Eloise's example, they could mine gender to their advantage. Sex appeal wouldn't dominate their mindset. Instead, they could take traditionally boyish risks and perform them with the flamboyance reserved for girls. Eloise holds out the hope that life's possibilities can be more generous and thrilling if you have courage and imagination. "Be what you are. Give what is yours to give. Have style. Dare," writes Stanley Kunitz in *Journal for My Daughter*. "Daughter read: what do I want of my life? More! More!" That passion and fearlessness undergirds everything Eloise does. And she seems to be wise to her own wisdom. At the end of *Eloise in Moscow*, she confides, "Oh, I could tell you a lot." It might be her sole understatement.

ALEXANDRA STARR

ALEXANDRA STARR is the Capitol Hill correspondent for *Business Week*.

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Every Public School a Charter School?

Bill Evers is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

In 2000, Andrei Cherny—a senior speechwriter for Al Gore and principal author of the 2000 Democratic Party's national platform—wrote a fascinating but somewhat neglected book entitled *The Next Deal.* In his book, Cherny sketches a program of free trade, competition, decentralization, deregulation, and "trust in the people to make their own decisions" designed to appeal to members of the Internet generation.

To reform public education, Cherny proposes making every public school a charter school, empowering parents to choose which public charter school their child would attend, and letting these charter schools be managed by a variety of providers, including religious groups and private companies. (Charter schools are public schools that operate on their own and are relieved of most government regulations, except those pertaining to health, safety, and racial discrimination.)

"This would strap the money to the backs of children," Cherny writes, "instead of giving it to the schools, forcing public schools to compete against one another for students and the funds they bring with them. This force of competition would compel all schools to get better."

Why is making every public school a charter school attractive? For liberals and Democrats who acknowledge that big-city schools have failed, universal charters do not take money away from existing public schools but rather reorganize those schools in a less bureaucratic way. Also, charters have long been endorsed in principle, though often treated skeptically in practice, by both labor unions and leading Democratic figures. **Labor unions might like universal charters because existing schools, where unions are already established, could be turned into charter schools** and the unions would thus be more influential than they are when charter schools are started from scratch. Labor unions would also prefer universal charters to universal vouchers, which would be redeemable in both public and private schools.

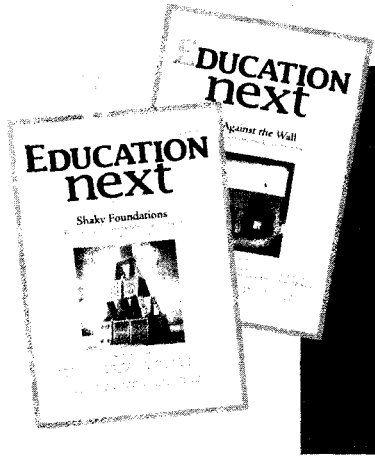
Universal charters are perhaps more attractive to New Democrats than to conservatives and libertarians. But some conservatives would like the increased opportunities for children and choices for parents, whereas some libertarians would like the fact that universal charters do not entangle existing private schools in government money and regulations.

Obviously, many details need to be worked out: Who would decide when to build new charter schools and when to make capital improvements? Would state, county, and local boards of education act as chartering agencies? What kind of accountability would there be for this multitude of charter schools? Through what procedure would a failing charter school be shut down?

In 2002, Cherny ran for the Democratic nomination for a California State Assembly seat. He lost his primary race by eleven percentage points in a campaign in which special interest groups opposed him, in part because of his innovative ideas on school reform. Cherny's own political career may have suffered a setback, but the need for school improvement has not gone away. Something drastic has to be done to help children trapped in failing big-city schools.

— *Bill Evers*

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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